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NEW YORK UNIVERSITY SERIES
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GRADUATE SCHOOL STUDIES

THE ESSAY IN AMERICAN
LITERATURE

BY

ADALINE MAY CONWAY, PH.D.

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THE ESSAY IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO NEW YORK
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BY
ADALINE MAY CONWAY, Ph.D.

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TO MY
FRIENDS

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THE ESSAY IN AMERICAN LITERATURE.

INTRODUCTION.

The Essay—a neglected field of investigation.

The Essay, as such, has flourished in English literature for three centuries, and claims a noble heritage in illustrious antiquity. Since its first appearance it has numbered among its cultivators the most famous and best-beloved representatives of our literary life. Other literatures have fostered the Essay until the permanence and universality of this delightful literary product seem to be recognizable and assured. Nevertheless, as a form of literary art, the Essay has suffered an almost absolute neglect at the hands of scholars. Numerous works have been dedicated to the study of poetry, the drama and the novel, but with the exception of fragmentary chapters and articles, the Essay from an historical and stylistic point of view remains uninvestigated. An intensive study of its development would take me far beyond the limitations of this work, but a brief survey of its nature and history seems necessary before undertaking the investigation of the Essay in American literature.

Difficulty of definition.

The fact that a comprehensive definition of *essay* seems impossible to find is significant in suggesting one reason why scholars have hesitated to approach this subject. Worcester calls it "a short treatise or dissertation, a tract;" and Webster defines it as "a composition treating of any particular subject;—usually shorter and less methodical than a formal, finished treatise." But it is as confusing to compare an essay with a treatise as it is hard sometimes to draw the line between them. Some essays are as lengthy as a treatise, and others by their brevity or by their nature, are in no wise to be classed with treatises or dissertations. Moreover, as to being less methodical, the essay has a method quite distinctive and obvious, though it may be less formal than that of the treatise. [No dictionary definition, and, in fact, no brief, formal statement which attempts to distinguish it by length alone can comprehend the Essay, because it is a form of writing so inclusive and expansive that it has come to identify as examples of its kind such diverse expressions in literature as the letter, the dialogue, the character sketch,

(1) Title of book

and many purely expository and critical writings.] These formal definitions of the term have added another difficulty to the treatment of this subject for they are responsible for the modern tendency to use the word *essay* in denoting the sermon, political tract, scientific exposition or extended book review; whereas, the Essay, if it be true to its type, is quite distinct from any of these. What, then, is the recognizable essay-element which will enable us to distinguish the Essay from all other closely allied prose forms?

Bacon's use
of the term.

Lord Bacon, the first Englishman to avow himself a ~~writer of essays~~, states with characteristic directness many of the essentials of the Essay, and especially those which serve to distinguish it from the treatise. In dedicating his volume to Prince Henry,¹ he says—

"Having divided my life into the contemplative and active part, I am desirous to give his Majesty and your Highness of the fruits of both, simple though they be. To write just treatises, requireth leisure in the writer and leisure in the reader. . . . which is the cause that hath made me choose to write certain brief notes, set down rather significantly than curiously, which I have called Essays. The word is late but the thing is ancient."

We notice that the Essay was, to Bacon, the result of contemplation; that it consisted of brief notes requiring less time in the writing and in the reading than the treatise, from which it also differed in that but little care was given to the form so long as the contents proved suggestive, thus "set down significantly rather than curiously."

* Derivation
of the word.

A study of the genesis of the Essay reveals the truth of Bacon's statement that "the word is new but the thing is ancient." Bacon borrowed the word from the French. In 1850 Montaigne had given that name to his own quaint "well-meaning Booke," and both Bacon and Montaigne applied the word in its exact sense. It is derived from the Latin *exigere*,² meaning to test very exactly, to apply to a standard weight or measure; hence the Latin word *exagium* meant a weighing or a standard weight, and from it came the Italian *saggio*, a proof, trial or sample, the French *essai*, a trial, and the English forms

(2) ¹ Fourth Edition. The *Essaies* of Sir Francis Bacon, Knight, the King's Solicitor General. Imprinted at London by John Beale, 1612.

² For a comparison of the precedence of the Latin and Greek origin of the word see an article by J. P. Postgate entitled "The Ultimate Derivation of Essay" in the *American Journal of Philology*. Vol. VI. 1885.

"assay" and "essay." An assay of any substance was an attempt to weigh it, measure it, and determine its character and value. This was exactly the process to which Bacon submitted the subjects of his meditations; and he was, perhaps, rather more consistent in his application of the word *essay* than his model, Montaigne, who had a predilection for getting away from his subject, though in doing so he exhibited certain mood qualities to which I shall presently refer as proving him to be the more ideal Essayist.

* The origin of the Essay in oral discourse.

So much for the word "Essay." But whence came the "thing" which Bacon deemed ancient? The Essay is, in origin, the utterance of a thought suggested by some experience or observation. Since the beginning, man has employed his leisure moments in contemplating the world and his fellow-men and attempting to interpret life, and, having been endowed with a communicative nature, he has delighted to give utterance to his personal views on all subjects that came within his comprehension. Obviously the Essay was at first a brief *spoken discourse*, with which it has remained closely allied, as is evident from the fact that some of the best of our modern essays were originally delivered from the lecture platform. Even as civilization advanced, the oral utterance continued for some time to be paramount in expressing and preserving the wisdom of the ancients. The thoughts of Socrates were made known in his discourses and, as such, are available to us in the *memorabilia* of the men who listened to him. Aristotle taught by means of the spoken word, and Plato furnished the models of the dialogue essay. The wisdom-literature of the Bible and Apocrypha presents many groups of wise meditations, presumably delivered orally and then written down, which, if detached from the context according to their theme, and given an appropriate title, become closely allied to the essay both in spirit and method.¹

The first

written essays.

The written essay, when it made its first appearance, had no identity of its own, but occurred as a parenthetical reflection made by some narrator or historian. At length the ancient writers gave more definite expression to their contemplative moods, and thus we are able to distinguish oc-

¹ The *Ecclesiasticus*, or *Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach*, is rich in examples of the essay form. Cf. *The Literary Study of the Bible*. By R. G. Moulton, London. 1896.

casional model essays interspersed in the works of both Greek and Latin authors.

Greek) The Greeks enjoyed too little leisure from wars and
Essayists. dissensions to foster many men of purely contemplative mood, and accordingly we look to them for the less subjective arts of poetry, philosophy and oratory; yet Greece produced Plutarch, who in his *Morals* and *Symposia* added the note of familiarity and gave to posterity certain ideal essay utterances which made him the model of Montaigne and the best of Montaigne's followers. Xenophon also, while enjoying the leisure of exile, interspersed his works with many short reflections which are model essays of their kind.

Latin | Roman life, in the early empire was more secure
Essayists. than that of Greece, and as a result we distinguish in its literature a form of writing more nearly approaching the modern essay. Cicero, in such works as *De Amicitia*, *De Officiis* and *De Natura Deorum*, retained the oratorical quality, but bequeathed to us a series of perfectly constructed and methodical writings—the prototypes of the more elaborate and formal of our modern essays. Marcus Aurelius in his *Meditations*, Seneca in his *Morals and Maxims*, and Epictetus in his *Manual and Fragments* suggest the essay type. But of all the Romans it is Aulus Gellius in his *Attic Nights* who best exemplifies the true essay spirit in writing down his personal observations and occasional speculations. Some extracts from his Preface are well worth quoting in this connection. He says of his *Attic Nights*—

“More pleasing works than the present may certainly be found; but my object in writing this, was to provide my children as well as myself with that kind of amusement, in which they might properly relax and indulge themselves, at the intervals from more important business. . . . I have most assiduously employed, and even wearied myself in all those intervals I could steal from business, in turning over and cursorily reading a great number of books. But I have selected from them not many things, and indeed only such as might lead lively and ingenious minds by a short and simple process, to the desire of liberal science, and the study of useful arts, or which might rescue men busied with other occupations, from a mean and disgraceful ignorance of things as well as words. . . . Of these therefore, if any such there be, who at their leisure may have some amusement in perusing these lucubrations, I would entreat, that if they shall find what they long since knew, they would not despise it as being

trite or very common; for what is there in literature so abstruse, but that many men know it? It is recommendation enough, that these have neither been prated over again and again in schools, nor thumbed in commentaries. Should they meet, perchance, with anything that is new and original, I think it just that they should weigh without any spirit of cavil, whether these few slight lessons are contemptible as to their power of exciting literary application, or languid in affording ingenious amusement, or whether they are not rather of that nature and description by which the natural talents may be improved and strengthened, the memory become more prompt, the faculty of reason more acute, the speech more correct, in hours of relaxation more delightful, and in exercise more liberal. As for those parts which may seem not sufficiently perspicuous, or too incomplete and scanty, *I beg leave to have them considered as written not so much to instruct as to suggest.*"¹

It is striking to find, among the ancient writers, the expression of an intention and method so marvellously akin to that of the more modern essayists, for thus Bacon and his contemporaries might have expressed their purpose. A perusal of his *Attic Nights* reveals how well Aulus Gellius made his writings the fulfillment of his Preface.

Montaigne, the first modern Essayist. I have briefly sketched the classical source from which the essay was derived. [We have seen that it originated in meditations, usually brief, upon some theme suggested by observation or experience, in little groups of wise sayings tersely expressed but suggesting much, and that it rarely made pretence to completeness of treatment or consistency of form.] The history of the Essay as a deliberately separate and recognizable expression in literature begins with Montaigne. Of a contemplative habit of mind and influenced no doubt by the classical writers whom we have noted, Montaigne became so completely absorbed in the essay mood that, in giving it expression, he expanded those essay elements which he had found in his beloved ancients into a distinctive form of writing to which he gave the name *Essay*. Then, being by nature frankly genial and outspoken, he added the one inimitable essay element, viz., the personal note. His address to the reader sounds the keynote of his book.²

¹ *The Attic Nights of Aulus Gellius*; Translated into English by the Revd. W. Belloe, London. 1796.

² *The Essays of Michael Lord of Montaigne*. Translated by John Florio. Edited with an Introduction and a Glossary by Henry Morley, London. 1893.

"Reader, loe here a well-meaning Booke. It doth at the first entrance forewarne thee, that in contriving the same, I have proposed unto myselfe no other than a familiar and private end. . . . Had my intention beene to forestal and purchase the world's opinion and favour, I would surely have adorned myselfe more quaintly, or kept a more grave and solemne march. I desire therein to be delineated in mine owne genuine, simple and ordinarie fashion, without contention, art or study; for it is my selfe I pourtray. My imperfections shall therein be read to the life, and my naturall forme discerned, so farre-forth as publike reverence hath permitted me. For if my fortune had been to have lived among those nations, which yet are said to live under the sweet liberty of nature's first and uncorrupted lawes, I assure thee, I would most willingly have pourtrayed my selfe fully and naked. Thus gentle reader my selfe am the groundworke of my booke."

Montaigne's essays an expression of his own personality.

We see that Montaigne's chief subject was to be himself; that he willingly abandoned the "more grave and solemne march" aiming, not to instruct his readers nor to ornament literature, but just to reveal his own personality and give vent to his own talkative

inclinations. Bacon imitates him in that both take "high-sounding moral themes" for their essay subjects, but unlike Bacon, Montaigne does not confine himself to the thought which purports to be the subject of his essay. We read his essay on Friendship, and finishing it, find he has added but little to our knowledge of friendship in the abstract, except as he affords us an inspiring insight into the character and friendliness of Michael De Montaigne. Thus, in all his attempts, it is the vagaries of his own temperament which we follow as he assumes successively the character of observer, scholar and philosopher, introducing concrete experiences, and narrative and descriptive elements. All this has its effect on the form of his essays. There is no attempt at completeness; the tone is often rambling; there is no seriousness of purpose, and no attempt at an "orderly or exhaustive" treatment; the reader makes no voluntary effort, his attention being unconsciously aroused and held. Many of these characteristics which mark the works of Montaigne remain distinctive of the true essay style in the writers who followed him.

It is this *personal note* which becomes the final test for distinguishing the essay from its allied forms. Every true essay is a revelation of personality. Bacon's essays are called impersonal and it is true that they do not deliberately reveal the outward characteristics of their author, yet by their very lack

Expression of personality distinguishes the Essay from other prose forms. of personal description and by their constant appeal to the intellect rather than to the emotions they are a revelation of Bacon's own individuality. Personality may be as completely expressed in terms of habits of thought as in a citation of biographical facts.

Thus the treatise may present a subject ever so thoroughly and yet be undeserving of the name of *essay* unless it reveals also the character or mentality of its author.

Various forms assumed by the Essay. Montaigne invented the Essay as a paramount means of taking us into his confidence. Since its invention by him, this alluring literary expression has been the experiment of numerous writers in many lands, and as was inevitable with a thing so elastic as to treatment and so much the product of individual temperament, the essay has assumed a variety of forms. Some men have made it a vehicle for exposition, serious reflection or careful criticism, and as a result the Didactic and Critical Essays have evolved. These are such a convenient expression for men with a scientific theory to expound, a point to prove, or a judgment to support, that in the hands of many, the essay has lost resemblance to its original type and become confusingly akin to the more lengthy and profound prose forms. Other writers, however, like Montaigne, have been content just to chat awhile, and to them we owe the perpetuation of the Personal Essay, with its delightful by-products, the biography, character sketch, dialogue and letter forms. These were the real essayists, the true followers of Montaigne, preserving his spirit and method but eliminating his faults and improving upon their model, as English prose style gradually ceased to be an accident and became an art.

THE ESSAY IN AMERICAN LITERATURE.

CHAPTER I.

THE COLONIAL PERIOD.

Brief survey
of the Essay
in England.

American literature is said to have begun in 1607 with the arrival of the first English colonists in this country. It might be more exact to say that in 1607 some English literature began to be written in America, for not until the colonists had won their independence and proved themselves capable of maintaining it permanently, did a real American era and literature begin. The first settlers were Englishmen, but they were immigrant Englishmen and from the beginning they showed the effects of having been transplanted. The American atmosphere at once began to give its own tone to their life and thoughts, and naturally the literature which embodied both we like to regard as American. Nevertheless England can justly claim it as hers, for did not these wandering children speak the language of the mother-country and claim also their inheritance in the thought and literature of the English generations which had preceded them? So, in the literature produced in America during the colonial period, we may discover characteristics which were subsequently to be regarded as American and at the same time note those English traits in which it closely resembles its parent literature. Even a limited field like the essay presents these distinctions and resemblances. It is interesting to observe that some of the colonial predecessors of the American essayists, men whose works show only here and there the essay quality, are more typically *American* than the avowed essayists who came later, the works of whom are obviously imitated from English patterns. Bacon had published the first edition of his essays in 1597, just ten years before the first English colonists came to America and the Seventeenth Century in England was prolific in the number of its essayists.¹ But the early colonists, removed

¹ Contemporary with Bacon were the following essayists: Sir William Cornwallis, *Essays*, Part I. 1600; Part II. 1601. Robert Johnson, *Essaies, or Rather Imperfect Offers*, 1601, and *Essaies*, 1607. ——— Johnson, *Essays Expressed in Sundry Exquisite Fancies*, 1638. John Stevens, *Satyrical Essays, Characters and others*, 1615. Henry Harflete, *A Bouquet of Essayes*, 1653.

as they were from the world's literary centres and activities, were probably less under the influence of these than of the writers who had preceded them. We have noted the classical authors upon whose works Bacon based his statement that only the name "essay" was new, and in English literature he might have discovered unnamed essays dispersed among the writings that had preceded his own. Even literature as early as that of the Fourteenth Century presents examples of the essay style. There are certain passages in the *Travels* of Sir John Mandeville which read like essays. Chaucer, in the *Tale of Melebius* bequeathed to us a genuine essay *On Getting and Using Riches*. Caxton's Preface to the *Book of Eneydos* is quaintly suggestive of Montaigne. Lord Burleigh addressed an admirable essay to his son *On the Well Ordering of a Man's Life*, and the writings of Sir Thomas Elyot, Roger Ascham, John Lyly and others present essay elements. But it is such works as Latimer's *Sermons*, Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*, and John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* in the Sixteenth Century, and in the Seventeenth, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Feltham's *Resolves*, John Donne's *Essays on Divinity* and Jeremy Taylor's *Homilies* which made a special appeal to the Puritans in America and left an influence upon their thoughts and writings.

Colonial predecessors of the American Essayists.

It is to New England that we look for colonial literature of such a nature as to embody anything like the Essay, for though Virginia in its first decades had produced some literature, it was chiefly historical and biographical, and during the balance of the period New England was the literary centre of the New World. Puritan traits are manifest in its literary output, which shows in a marked degree on the thought and spirit, if not on the manner and expression, the influence of such English essayists as those I have mentioned. This New England literature is, with a few exceptions, of a religious nature, written by clergymen who deliberately turned away from the lighter and richer types of writing in their mother-country.

Application of the word "Essay" in colonial times.

In connection with this we may note that our earliest writers do not seem to have adopted Bacon's use of the word "Essay" as applied to the delightful sort of literature to which he gave that name. By them the word "Essay" was used literally and merely meant an *attempt*. The result is confusing and rather disappointing to the modern

seeker after colonial essays. Thus David Zeisberger wrote an "Essay of a Delaware Indian and English Spelling Book" applying the term "Essay" to his attempt to compile a mere vocabulary, and later a grammar which he produced is also termed "Essay." John Eliot likewise wrote an Indian grammar and called it an "Essay." Other writers applied the word to various attempts in mathematics and science, as did Lewis Evans when he called his technical geographical and mechanical treatises by the name of "Essays."¹ The term became especially convenient for those austere Puritan preachers whose dreadful, awe-inspiring sermons and ponderous addresses, as soon as they found their way to the printing press were labelled essays, and as such are preserved to disappoint us.

One of the earliest and most remarkable publications to assume the name "Essay" was written by Increase Mather and published in 1683. Its very lengthy title at once describes and classifies the book. "*An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences wherein an Account is given of Many Remarkable and very memorable Events which have hapned this last age especially in New England.*" This work could not be classified as an essay under any possible definition of the term. Samuel Mather also applied the term confusingly to certain long discourses published in pamphlet form.² It is to his father, Cotton Mather, that we

Cotton
Mather's
"Essays to
Do Good" the
first collection
of American
Essays.

must look for works which are essays in nature as well as in name, and in these it is easy to trace the influence of Foxe, Fuller and Burton. There are about four hundred of his actual publications and many of them bear the name of "Essays." Of them all, however, there is one little book of real essays. I refer to the work commonly called *Essays to do Good*.³ After reading the contents, we find it possible to apply the word *essay* to them either, as the author probably did, to signify "Attempts to do Good," or in our own modern acceptance of the term, considering the volume a series of essays on the sub-

¹Geographical, Historical, Political, Philosophical, and Mechanical Essays by Lewis Evans, Philadelphia. 1756.

²*Irenicum: or an essay for Union*, by Samuel Mather, London, 1680, and others of a similar nature.

³The title of the first edition reads—"Bonifacius. An Essay upon the Good, that is to be devised and designed, By Those who desire to answer the great end of life, and to do good while they live." Boston. 1710.

ject of doing good in an evil world. These essays possess the *then* rare quality of brevity; each one is complete in itself, and each is suggestive rather than exhaustive; so that in method and spirit this volume is unique, appearing as it did in an age which used the term so indiscriminately; and being the first collection of writings to which we can apply the word essay in the same way that we use it in connection with the works of Bacon and his successors. The following essay is typical of the style and spirit which pervades them all. It is entitled—"Opportunities to do Good."

"Our opportunities to do good are our talents. An awful account must be rendered to the great God, concerning the use of the talents with which he has entrusted us in these precious opportunities. Frequently we do not use our opportunities, because we do not consider them; they lay unnoticed and unimproved. We read of a thing which we deride as often as we behold it. 'There is that maketh himself poor, and yet had great riches.' This is too frequently exemplified in our opportunities to do good, which are some of our most valuable riches. Many a man seems to reckon himself destitute of these talents, as if there was nothing for him to do; he pretends that he is not in condition to do good. Alas! poor man, what can he do? My friend, think again; think frequently; enquire what your opportunities are; you will certainly find them to be more than you are aware of. 'Plain men dwelling in tents,' persons of a very ordinary rank in life, may, by their eminent piety, prove persons of extraordinary usefulness. A poor John Urich may make a Groteus the better for him. I have read of a pious weaver, of whom some eminent persons would say, 'Christ walked, as it were, alive on the earth in that man.' A mean mechanic—who can tell what an engine of God he may become, if humbly and wisely applied to it?

This then is the next proposal. Without abridging yourselves of your occasional thoughts on the question 'What good may I do today?' Fix a time, now and then for more deliberate thoughts upon it. Cannot you find time, (say once a week, and how suitably on the Lord's day,) to take this question into consideration:

What is there that I may do for the service of the Glorious Lord, and for the Welfare of those for whom I ought to be concerned?

Having implored the direction of God, 'the Father of lights,' consider the matter in the various aspects of it. Consider it till you have resolved on something. Write down your resolutions. Examine what precept and what promise you can find in the word of God to countenance your resolutions. Review those memorials at proper seasons, and see how far you have proceeded in the

execution of them. The advantage of these preserved and revived memorials, no rhetoric will be sufficient to commend, no arithmetic to calculate. There are some animals of which we say 'they know not their own strength.' Christians, why should you be like them?"

Cotton Mather, then, may be said to have produced the first American volume of essays, genuine in spirit and method, and limited only by the restrictions of their subject matter. This work remains the only one of its kind to be published in America during the Seventeenth Century, and even in the Eighteenth we must search the newspapers and periodicals for detached essays and find few volumes devoted exclusively to genuine essays as is this little one of Cotton Mather's.

There were, however, excellent essays interspersed among the varied writings of other colonial writers. The American volume most popular in England in its own day was *The Simple Cobbler of Agawam*, written by Nathaniel Ward, and published in England in 1645, where it was at once in great demand. This work was a prose satire, and the Cobbler's opinions of the foibles and weaknesses of his day both in England and America, if detached and classified under appropriate headings, would read well as essays and seem to suggest the method of the *Tatler* and *Spectator* which came later. This book is interesting also as having been written in a manner truly American in its unaffected freedom and fearlessness.

From the rugged strength of Cotton Mather and the bold satire of the "Cobbler of Agawam," it is pleasant to turn to the writings of John Woolman, the kindly Quaker whose works in after years became dear to such kindred spirits of his own as Charles Lamb, William Ellery Channing and John Greenleaf Whittier. Woolman left several ethical and religious essays but it is in his Autobiography that we discover an admirable simplicity and ease, a leisurely rambling from subject to subject, and the personal note so characteristic of the best-loved essayists. The journal contains meditations on many topics. There are, "Considerations on Trading, and on the use of Spirituous Liquors and Costly Apparel"; "Thoughts on the neglect of a religious care in the education of Negroes"; "Contemplations on the nature of true wisdom, occasioned by hearing of the cruelty of the Indians to their captives"; "On Labour";

"On Schools"; "On the right use of the Lord's outward gifts," etc. I quote a short essay which breaks the narrative of his journal to embody the thoughts which came to him on a night spent alone in the open.

"Thus lying in the wilderness, and looking at the stars, I was led to contemplate on the condition of our first parents, when they were sent forth from the garden; but the Almighty, though they had been disobedient, continued to be a father to them, and showed them what tended to their felicity as intelligent creatures, and was acceptable to him. To provide things relative to our outward living in the way of true wisdom is good, and the gift of improving in things useful, is a good gift, and comes from the Father of Lights. Many have had this gift, and from age to age, there have been improvements of this kind made in the world; but some, not keeping to the pure gift, have, in the creaturely cunning and self-exaltation, sought out many inventions, which inventions of men, as distinct from that uprightness in which man was created, as the first motion to them was evil, so the effects have been and are evil. That, at this day, it is as necessary for us constantly to attend on the heavenly gifts, to be qualified to use rightly the good things in this life amidst our great improvements, as it was for our first parents, when they were without any improvements, without any friend or father, but God only.'

The Periodical
Essay in
England.

From these writers, we turn to a consideration of the Periodical Essay which came into existence in England during our colonial era. This seems to have had no influence upon our earliest writers and so I have purposely postponed considering it until I was ready to trace its influence upon our periodical literature.

When the Comedy of Manners came to be neglected upon the English stage, there was kindled a desire for some sort of literary expression to take its place in holding up a mirror for reflecting the foibles and peculiarities of the times. In 1703 Defoe had founded *The Review*, and this contained a column called the "Scandal Club," through which medium he exposed the social follies of his times, and from it Steele probably conceived the central idea of his *Tatler* which appeared in 1709, and of the famous *Spectator* and *Guardian* which followed. In all of these, the writings of Addison, and other friendly wits contributed an influence which made the fame and worth of these publications permanent in the history of English literature. Their medium of expression was the Essay, but it was a form of essay which they had the honor of inventing for themselves.

Departing from the classical and purely intellectual essays of Bacon, they seized upon the personal and familiar elements to be found in Montaigne and made their essays a direct means of communication between themselves and a public which they delighted to ridicule, admonish and advise through the direct and conversational medium of their periodical essays. Influenced perhaps by Theophrastus and by Sir Thomas Overbury whose *Characters* had appeared in the preceding century,¹ and in order to render themselves indispensable to that same public they had the wisdom to conceal their purpose by assuming characters, whose personality was recognizable enough to gain the interest of the reader and thus, to use Defoe's words "Wheedle men into a knowledge of the world, who rather than take more pains would be content with their ignorance." Addison, by the pure literary grace of his expression, made the *Spectator* papers classical, and saved these publications from the oblivion which might easily have been the fate of a form of writing, which by its very nature had no purpose but to leave an influence upon the manners and thoughts of its own period. Their scheme proved a far-reaching success. Their works were widely imitated in their own time, and after a short period of disfavor, were renewed by Johnson in his *Rambler* and *Idler*. Later literature contains the perfect flower of which these were only the seed, for with Hazlett, Lamb and Stevenson the Periodical Essay had reached beyond the restricted field of criticising contemporary manners, and had become the ideal Personal Essay.

But our investigation is of American literature, and here too we may discover the widespread influence of the *Spectator* and kindred publications. It is not until the colonies had broken away from England and begun their true American era, that we find representative essayists in whose works this influence is secondary to their own typical American characteristics.

Colonial journalism presents many paradoxes. The newspapers and periodicals of the period, if judged apart from the times which produced them, might seem scarcely worthy of consideration so

¹ Other Seventeenth Century writers of "Characters" were Joseph Hall, Nicholas Breton, Wye Saltonstall, Sir Francis Wortley, T. Ford and R. Flecknoe. The *Characters* were typical, dealing with the external, accidental aspects of mankind. In the *Essay*, characters became individual, and their essential, permanent and internal traits are set forth.

far as their contents are concerned, but remembering the trying circumstances under which they came into existence, and the struggle that had to be made in order to keep them alive, we handle them reverently and feel that they need no apology. It is true that even a study of the essays in our earliest journals reveals a degeneration from the spontaneous, fearless strength in style which marked the first colonial writers as American. There are many servile imitators whose nerveless expression simulates the literary language of the mother-country. There is little writing of the class known as "*Belles Lettres*," and such as appears is often weak and unworthy. At the same time there are flashes of originality and true American spirit; side by side with much that is mediocre we find occasional rare gems of thought and expression. By throwing the search-light of history upon these pages, and approaching them in a spirit of regard rather than of ridicule, it is possible to find embodied there our whole national story.

The Essays
of The Ameri-
can Weekly
Mercury.

The first product of American journalism was *Public Occurrences* which appeared in Boston in 1690. The only existing copy of this paper is in the Colonial State Paper Office in London. This was followed by the *Boston News Letter* in 1704, and in 1719 was printed in Philadelphia *The American Weekly Mercury*, the first newspaper to be continuously published in the Middle Colonies. The only complete file of this paper is to be found in the Ridgeway branch of the Philadelphia Library Company. This last named publication is worth noticing in detail, for it is typical of all the colonial newspapers and rather better than the average, while at the same time it exhibits an interesting phase in the study of our literary evolution. The *Mercury* was issued once a week and as announced in the advertisement which heralded its coming, it was to contain "an impartial account of Transactions in the several states of Europe, America, etc." For three years this paper, like others of the period, persevered in its prudent plan of publishing only news, market quotations and advertisements, refraining from the luxury of editorial comment and literary effort. Its earlier numbers are expressive of the narrow outlook of the colonists and show how small a margin of time they could devote to literary pursuits. The first attempt to publish anything different was made on February 13, 1722, and it is perhaps significant that the departure then took the form of

one of the political letters of Cato, reprinted from an English publication, and this was followed by other "Cato" letters. In January, 1724, when news was scarce and slow in reaching the colonies, some thoughtful correspondent became sensible of the excellencies of those English periodicals to which I have referred and we find the following letter inserted in the columns of the *Mercury*, which seems to merit quotation for it is the first evidence of the influence that Addison and Steele were to have in American letters.

"In this scarcity of *News* it may be acceptable and useful to fill up the *Mercury* with some pieces of *Morality* or other Instructive Animadversions out of Books which may not be in every Body's Hands. The *Spectator* among others affords many such. And hearing that a Busy Great Man of the present Mode, having turned his Thoughts wholly to Politicks, and the good Fellowship that he finds in the Sun, is for selling the 7 Volumes cheap it may not be amiss to buy them for that purpose, and to Retail, with judgement, such as are proper and suitable. For a specimen, I have sent part of one, which is mostly made up of a quotation from the late A. B. Tillotson, and I suppose, from that familiar way of expressing the good Sence and Judgement which run through his writings."¹

Notice the casual critical touch at the close of the letter. It is the first hesitating attempt at literary criticism which I was able to find in the colonial newspapers. This unknown correspondent adds the extract which he mentions as Tillotson's. The editor of the *Mercury* seems to have suddenly realized the fact that such quotations would add to the popularity of his paper and in the succeeding numbers we find many quotations from contemporary English publications, though usually they were prefixed apologetically by the phrase "published in this scarcity of news." In the very next month the editor takes it upon himself to insert an essay on "Entertainments" which is an excerpt of a treatise by Marcus Varro. By 1732, the minds of the subscribers had been sufficiently stimulated by these borrowed essays and we begin to find original essays contributed by various readers.² Many of these are unworthy of note, but there are

¹ In the quotations of the earlier essays embodied in this chapter, I have used the spelling, punctuation and capitalization which appeared in the original editions. Towards the end of the period we note less inconsistency and idiosyncrasy in this matter.

² Benjamin Franklin and Joseph Breintal contributed the "Busybody" papers.

some that seem worth preserving like the following original essay which appeared in the number for December 22, 1737, and which shows a noticeable improvement on the formless efforts of many of the *Mercury's* correspondents.

“Mirth and Cheerfulness consistent with Religion:—

There are in every Thing Extremes, and we are very apt to run into one or the other of them. Religion has suffered very much by this Proneness to carry any Notion too far. The *Gloomy* and *Morose* dress up Religion in the Habit of their own Melancholy or Sour Temper, which has given Rise to *Superstitions* and *rigid* Doctrines and Practises; the Gay and Sprightly, are as forward to mould Religion to their own Genius, and to fancy that they are affecting agreeably to the Intention of their Maker, whenever they are indulging their Inclination toward Mirth and Plesantry. The former think it a Sin to take any Pleasure, and the latter seem to imagine that we came into the World for *nothing else*.

A Person indeed, who is conscious to himself of *notorious* Offences against God, or of an *irreligious Habit of Life*, has no Opportunity for Cheerfulness, while he ought to be confessing his own Wickedness and Folly, and labouring to reform his Nature by getting rid of old, stubborn Habits, and introducing new ones.

A State of *Repentance* must in the Nature of Things, be a State of *Sorrow* and *Uneasiness*; and the business of *Amendment* being a continual opposition to our Inclinations and Dispositions, it is impossible we can reasonably be in a Humour to be very Cheerful till the Difficulties are over, and we have more Reason to be satisfied with our own conduct, and to think ourselves in the Favour of God. But I would now speak of those who have Testimony of their Conscience, that, in the *General Tenour* of their Lives, they honestly endeavour to know and to do their Duty. And who can have so much Reason to be Merry, as one who has Reason to think that God is his Friend, and that he is entitled to eternal Happiness? Is not an uniform Habit of Religion the most Pleasant thing in Nature? And while we are naturally and Rationally pleased with our conduct, and full of Joyful Expectations, is not this a proper Fund of Perpetual Cheerfulness?

Besides, the very Inclination to Mirth, is a plain Indication that Providence intended that we *should* be Merry, as Hunger and Thirst show that it is lawful, because natural, to eat and drink. Our animal Spirits, our Sprightliness of Constitution, our Aptness for Wit and Plesantry, were not given us by a good and bountiful God, only that we should be at the Trouble and Uneasiness of denying ourselves all Indulgence of them, but for our Comfort in Life, to sweeten and enliven it, and render ourselves agreeable to one another. But then our Mirth and Cheerful-

ness like our Passions, are liable to excess, and must be under the watchful Restraint of *Reason*. They are apt to degenerate into *Levity*, and by being too often, or too long indulged at one time, to beget an inaptness for the Duties of Religion and common Life, to throw the Mind off its Guard, and to betray us too frequently into *Indiscretions*, often into *Vices*. Our Mirth, like all other Diversions was designed by way of Refreshment, or Relaxation of the Mind; by unbending it and giving it Time to recover and recruit itself, after it had been a sufficient Time employed in a serious way.

The whole in short is this: Without Mirth and Cheerfulness we should sink into Superstition and Dejection; if not into Despair; but our Mirth must not be too frequent, nor too long at one Time, for then it would destroy the true Frame of Mind and interrupt the proper Business of a Religious and Rational Creature in this Life. The old Proverb is a very significant one, 'Be merry and wise.'

The first
American
Magazines.

The first American magazine was *The General Magazine and Historical Chronicle for all the British Plantations in America* published in January, 1741,¹ by Benjamin Franklin. Of Franklin's own contributions to our essays I shall treat in the next chapter. This magazine, though it contains but few essays with any degree of merit is noteworthy not only because it was the first to be published in America and included the prototypes of many forms of magazine writing which are indispensable in the magazines of today, but also as an evidence of the broadening of the field of *Belles Lettres* in the few years that had passed since the beginning of American journalism. Here we find "Accounts of and extracts from New Books, Pamphlets, etc. published in the Plantations" and "Essays on various subjects from the American Newspapers." There are numbered among its contributions long articles not unlike the leading articles of our modern magazines. The essays are liberally quoted from English periodicals, but we find that there is still a perversion of the term "Essay" which in this magazine, as in others of its period, is applied to correspondence on all sorts of subjects, and more remarkable still, all the bad poems in which the numbers abound are termed "Poetical Essays."

Influence
of the
"Spectator."

In the newspapers and magazines which follow we notice more and more the influence of the *Spectator* and similar English periodicals. These American

¹ This is commonly called the first American magazine but John Webb had issued *The American Magazine* three days before the appearance of Franklin's, by which it was soon supplanted.

publications became a medium of expression for various friends of the editors whose ventures they wished to help along, desiring at the same time to see their own thoughts in print. These unpaid contributors assumed characters, as did Addison, Steele and Johnson, and over their chosen signatures conducted columns of their own contributions and correspondence with readers, sometimes lively, more often monotonous, and rarely approaching anything like the art of their English models.¹

Journalism
at the close of
the Colonial
Period.

It would be in no wise contributory to make separate mention of all the magazines, periodicals and gazettes which were published during the closing years of the colonial period, and nearly all of which contain few or many essays. As the numbers of these various periodicals approach the time of the Revolution, we note that more and more space is devoted to politics² and important current news, to the exclusion of all entertaining contributions. *Belles Lettres* were about to suffer a period of enforced dormancy. There is one magazine, however, which deserves special mention, and of all those examined it was the last to be published in the period of which this chapter treats. The magazine referred to is *The Pennsylvania Magazine or American Monthly Museum*, printed by R. Aitken, and this exhibits in a truly remarkable degree the rapid improvement that had taken place not only in the nature of our journalistic literature, but also in the breadth and scope of our national thought. This magazine numbered among its essayists such men as John Trumbull, Francis Hopkinson and John Witherspoon, whom the next period was to make famous, and there is in all of its pages a decidedly uplifted tone in thought and expression. With its appearance our periodicals suddenly rose out of their provincialism and won an American individuality, and this fact seems all the more remarkable when we remember the troublous times in which it appeared. It was founded on the very eve of the American Revolution, and yet it would seem that the same spirit which moved those men to

¹ Thus we find columns contributed by "The Old Bachelor," "The Druid," "The Meddler," "The Hermit," "The Planter," "The Prattler," "The Impartial Politician," etc.

The Bibliography contains a full list of all the newspapers, periodicals, etc., which were consulted in preparing this chapter.

² Many deservedly famous political essays appeared toward the close of this period, to which special reference will be made in the next chapter.

break loose from the political trammels of the mother-country impelled them also to win an independence of thought and expression in literature. Of the strength of their purpose, the founding and successful continuance of such magazines as this are abiding evidence. I shall let the editor sum up his own difficulties as expressed in his Preface.

It should be observed that we are altogether deprived of one considerable fund of entertainment which contributes largely to the embellishment of the magazines in Europe, viz. Discoveries of the curious remains of antiquity, the descriptions of which often lead to interesting confirmations of historical facts, or plainly points to the rites and ceremonies of former ages. A new settled country cannot be expected to afford any entertainment of this kind. We can look no farther back than to the rude manners and customs of the savage *aborigines of North America*. Nevertheless, as even they may afford many curious particulars, we should be much obliged to any of our correspondents who should furnish us with such accounts of them as come to their knowledge.¹

But the principal difficulty in our way is the present unfortunate condition of public affairs. These, whose leisure and abilities might lead them to a successful application of the Muses, now turn their attention to the rude preparations for war. Every heart and hand seem to be engaged in the interesting struggle for *American Liberty*. Till this important point is settled, the pen of the poet and the books of the learned must be in a great measure neglected. The arts and sciences are not cultivated to advantage, but in the fruitful soil of peace, and in the fostering sunshine of *Constitutional Liberty*.

There is in the first number an essay so excellent that I have considered the following extracts from it a fitting conclusion to this chapter, for in style and content they seem to reflect credit on the essay of the period that was ending and at the same time prophesy better things for the period to come.

“A magazine can never want matter in America, if the inhabitants will do justice to their own abilities. Agriculture and manufacturing owe much of their improvement in England to hints first thrown out in some of their magazines. Gentlemen whose abilities enable them to make experiments, frequently chose this method of communication, on account of its convenience. And why should not the same spirit operate in America? I have no doubt but of seeing, in a little time, an American magazine full of more useful matter, than I ever saw in an English

¹ We note here the editor's naïve confession that he had an eye to business.

one: Because we are not exceeded in abilities, have a more extensive field for enquiry; and whatever may be our political state, our happiness will always depend on ourselves."

"The press has not only a great influence over our manners and morals, but contributes largely to our pleasures; and a magazine, when properly enriched is very conveniently calculated for this purpose. Voluminous works weary the patience, but here we are united by conciseness and variety. As I have formerly received much pleasure from perusing these kinds of publications, I wish the *present* success; and have no doubt of seeing a proper diversity blended so agreeably together, as to furnish out an *Olio* worthy of the company for whom it is designed.

I consider a magazine as a kind of bee-hive, which both allures the swarm, and provides room to store the sweets. Its division into cells gives every bee a province of its own; and though they all produce honey, yet perhaps they differ in their taste for flowers, and extract with greater dexterity from one than from another. Thus we are not all Philosophers, all Artists, nor all Poets."

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST AMERICAN PERIOD.

1775-1807.

Benjamin
Franklin as
an Essayist.

Literary events are not always simultaneous with historical ones, and in studies of literature it sometimes seems consistent to make the divisions of time fall in line with new departures in literary activities rather than with historical epochs. For that reason, though I have ventured to let this chapter begin with the date that marks the commencement of the Revolution because the years of warfare left their definite impression upon the essays of the period, I have ended it with the date of the appearance of Washington Irving's first publication, for the reason that with Irving began a new literary era more distinctly American than this one, which is American only in retrospect and so called because the prophecy of 1776 was fulfilled in the final establishment of an American nation. Somewhat the same motive has induced me to leave for this chapter the consideration of the essays of Benjamin Franklin, for although many of them appeared in the decades covered by the first chapter, it was the events of this period which brought Franklin into a world-wide prominence, and an enduring fame which lent an interest and value to his writings over and above that of their literary merit.

Influence of
"The Specta-
tor" upon
Franklin's
style.

The essays of Franklin have been of secondary interest to many of his biographers and they were probably justified in making *Poor Richard* and the *Autobiography* their chief consideration. But nevertheless, as an essayist, Franklin holds a distinctive place in our literature. It was he who departed from the colonial traditions and restrictions, adopted a true literary method, became a pioneer of American humor, gave to his works an American individuality, made them dear to his contemporaries and us, and blazed a trail for the greater essayists who were to follow him. Franklin was the first American writer to make a definite study of prose style and to keep to its canons in his writings. Readers of his *Autobiography* are familiar with

the account of his earliest reading. In connection with our study of his colonial predecessors among the American essayists we note that one of the first books to be read by him was Cotton Mather's *Essays to do Good*. Still more interesting is his account of how he came under the influence of the *Spectator*. He says—

“About this time, I met with an odd volume of the *Spectator*. I had never before seen any of them. I bought it, read it over and over, and was much delighted with it. I thought the writing excellent, and wished if possible to imitate it. With that view, I took some of the papers, and making short hints of the sentiments in each sentence, laid them by for a few days, and then, without looking at the book, tried to complete the paper again, by expressing each hinted sentiment at length, and as fully as it had been expressed before, in any suitable words that should occur to me. Then I compared my *Spectator* with the original, discovered some of the faults, and corrected them. But I found I wanted a stock of words, or a readiness in recollecting and using them, which I thought I should have acquired before that time, if I had gone on making verses; since the continual search for words of the same import, but of different length to suit the measure, or of different sound for the rhyme, would have laid me under a constant necessity of searching for variety, and also have tended to fix that variety in my mind, and make me master of it. Therefore I took some of the tales in the *Spectator*, and turned them into verse, and, after a time, when I had pretty well forgotten the prose, turned them back again.

I also sometimes jumbled my collection of hints into confusion, and after some weeks endeavoured to reduce them into the best order before I began to form the full sentences and complete the subject. This was to teach me method in the arrangement of the thoughts. By comparing my work with the original, I discovered many faults, and corrected them; but I sometimes had the pleasure to fancy, that, in certain particulars of small consequence, I had been fortunate enough to improve the method or the language, and this encouraged me to think, that I might in time come to be a tolerable English writer; of which I was extremely ambitious.¹

Franklin never outgrew his admiration of the Addisonian style and all of his works show its influence. His earlier essays in particular are usually designated as Addisonian. The first of these were the “Dogood” papers, which appeared anonymously in his brother's weekly, the *New England Courant*. These papers are not inserted in any collection of his works. No men-

¹ The works of Benjamin Franklin, edited by Jared Sparks, Vol. I, p. 18.

tion is made of them as such in the *Autobiography*, but in the notes kept by Franklin when about to write his life he claims them as his own, and it is to these papers that he refers in the following account of his earliest literary efforts.

"Being still a boy, and suspecting that my brother would object to printing anything of mine in his paper, if he knew it to be mine, I contrived to disguise my hand, and, writing an anonymous paper I put it at night under the door of the printing house. It was found in the morning, and communicated to his writing friends when they called in as usual. They read it, commented on it in my hearing, and I had the exquisite pleasure of finding it met with their approbation, and that, in their different guess at the author, none were named but men of some character among us for learning and ingenuity. I suppose, that I was rather lucky in my judges, and that they were not really so good as I then believed them to be. Encouraged however by this attempt, I wrote and sent in the same way to the press several other pieces, that were equally approved."¹

His early
Essays.

These essays, written in the character of "Silence Dogood" show how closely Franklin followed his *Spectator* models in spirit, diction and method. Mrs. Dogood wished to please and amuse her readers, and succeeded in doing so by a series of papers on a motley assortment of themes.² These papers will not stand comparison with his later essays, yet even in these early efforts Franklin gave to his contemporaries a much-needed example in the use of good readable English. His next essays were the "Busybody" papers, contributed to Bradford's *American Weekly Mercury*. In these, Franklin showed a more serious motive than that which prompted the "Dogood" series, aiming still to amuse his readers, but also to check their follies and give them an impetus toward a broader culture and an improved method of expression in literature. The following essay, the first of the series, expresses his intentions and illustrates the style of the papers which he contributed to the "Busybody" series.

Mr Andrew Bradford: I design this to acquaint you that I, who have long been one of your courteous readers, have lately entertained some thought of setting up for an author myself;

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

² The *New England Courant*, in its earlier numbers contained many readable essays.

not out of the least vanity, I assure you, or desire of showing my parts, but purely for the good of my country.

I have often observed with concern that your *Mercury* is not always equally entertaining. The delay of ships expected in and want of fresh advices from Europe make it frequently very dull; and I find the freezing of our river has the same effect on news as trade. With more concern have I continually observed the growing vices and follies of my countryfolk; and though reformation is properly the concern of every man, that is, every one ought to mend one; yet it is too true the case that what is everybody's business is nobody's business; and the business is done accordingly. I therefore, upon mature deliberation, think fit to take nobody's business wholly into my own hands; and, out of zeal for the public good, design to erect myself into a kind of censor morum, purposing with your allowance to make use of the Weekly Mercury as a vehicle in which my remonstrances shall be conveyed to the world.

I am sensible I have in this particular undertaken a very unthankful office, and expect little besides labour for my pains. Nay, it is possible I may displease a great number of your readers, who will not very well like to pay ten shillings a year for being told of their faults. But, as most people delight in censure when they themselves are not the object of it, if they are offended at my publicly exposing their private vices, I promise they shall have satisfaction, in a very little time, of seeing their good friends and neighbors in the same circumstances.

However, let the fair sex be assured that I shall always treat them and their affairs with the utmost decency and respect. I intend now and then to dedicate a chapter wholly to their service; and if my lectures any way contribute to the embellishment of their minds and brightening of their understandings, without offending their modesty, I doubt not of having their favor and encouragement.

It is certain that no country in the world produces naturally finer spirits than ours; men of genius for every kind of science, and capable of acquiring to perfection every quality that is in esteem among mankind. But as few here have the advantage of good books, for want of which good conversation is still more scarce, it would doubtless have been very acceptable to your readers, if, instead of an old out-of-date article from Muscovy or Hungary, you had entertained them with some well-chosen extracts from a good author. This I shall sometimes do, when I happen to have nothing of my own to say that I think of more consequence. Sometimes I purpose to deliver lectures of morality or philosophy, and (because I am naturally inclined to be meddling with things that do not concern me) perhaps I may sometimes talk politics. And if I can by any means furnish out a weekly entertainment for the public that will give a rational diversion, and at the same time be instructive to the readers, I shall think

my leisure hours well employed; and if you publish this I hereby invite all ingenious gentlemen and others (that approve of such an undertaking) to my assistance and correspondence.

It is like by this time that you have a curiosity to be acquainted with my name and character. As I do not aim at public praise, I design to remain concealed; and there are such numbers of our family and relations at this time in the country, that though I have signed my name at full length, I am not under the least apprehension of being distinguished and discovered by it. My character indeed, I would favour you with, but that I am cautious of praising myself, lest I should be told my Trumpeter's dead; and I cannot find in my heart at present to say anything to my own disadvantage. It is very common with authors, in their first performances, to talk to their readers thus; "If this meets with a suitable reception, or, if this should meet with due encouragement, I shall hereafter publish, etc." This only manifests the value they put on their own writings, since they think to frighten the public into their applause, by threatening that, unless you approve what they have already wrote, they intend never to write again; when perhaps it may not be a pin matter whether they ever do or no. As I have not observed the critics to be more favorable on this account, I shall always avoid saying anything of the kind; and conclude with telling you that, if you send me a bottle of ink and a quire of paper by the bearer, you may depend on hearing further from, Sir, your most humble servant,

The Busybody.¹

It would not be fair to compare these early essays of Franklin's with those of Addison, nor to judge them by modern standards. In order to value them at their true worth we must recognize the fact that they contain certain excellencies which, until their appearance, had been entirely lacking in the colonial periodical productions,—the use of a pure English diction, a style simple, direct and free of bombast and ornamentation, an admirable clearness of expression by which Franklin remains one of the most readable of all our essayists. "No man ever read a sentence of Franklin's essays and doubted what it meant," says a biographer² and we wonder if such a statement could be made of his most famous successors in the field of American Essay writing.

Other Essays. In 1729 Franklin and Meredith became proprietors

¹ I quote from the Bigelow edition of the complete works of Franklin, Vol. 1, p. 329. This essay originally appeared in the *American Weekly Mercury* of February 4, 1728.

² *Benjamin Franklin as a Man of Letters*, by John Bach McMaster, Boston. 1896.

of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*,¹ and in this paper Franklin, for lack of other contributors, "carried on a lively correspondence with himself," by a series of papers instructive or amusing. In the *Gazette* he published more serious essays, and the following of his best known pieces originally appeared in its numbers. "The Meditations of a Quart Mug," "The Account of the Witch Trial at Mount Holly" and "The Thoughts of the Ephemera on Human Vanity" any of which will bear comparison with some of the essays of Addison. I quote the *Ephemera*.

Sir:—Meeting with the following little curious Piece the other Day, I send it to you to re-publish, as it is now in very few Hands. There is something so elegant in the Imagination, convey'd in so delicate a Stile, and accompany'd with a Moral so just and elevated, that it must yield great Pleasure and Instruction to every mind of real Taste and Virtue.

Cicero in his *Tusculan Questions*, freely exposes the Vain Judgement we are apt to form of the duration of Human Life, compared to Eternity. In illustrating this Argument, he quotes a passage of Natural History from *Aristotle* concerning a species of Insects on the Banks of the *River Hypanis*, that never outlive the Day in which they are born.

To pursue the Thought of this elegant Writer; Let us suppose one of the most robust of these *Hypanians* (so famed in History) was in a manner Coeval with Time itself, that he began to exist at the Break of Day; and that, from the uncommon Strength of his Constitution, he has been able to show himself active in Life through the numberless winters of Ten or Twelve Hours. Through so long a Series of Seconds, he must have acquired vast Wisdom in his Way, from Observation and Experience. He looks upon his Fellow-Creatures, who died about Noon, to be Happily delivered from the many Inconveniences of Old Age; and can perhaps recount to his Great Grandson a surprising Tradition of Actions before any Records of their Nation were extant. The young Swarm, who may be advanced one Hour in Life, approach his Person with Respect, and listen to his improving Discourse. Every Thing he says will seem wonderful to this short-lived Generation. The compass of a Day will be esteemed a whole Duration of Time; and the first Dawn of Light will in their Chronology be stiled the Great Era of their Creation.

Let us now suppose this Venerable Insect, this Nestor of *Hypanis*, should a little before his Death, and about Sun-set, send for all his Descendants, his Friends and his Acquaintance, out of the Desire he may have to impart his Last Thoughts to them, and to admonish them with his parting Breath. They meet

¹ Originally known as "The Universal Instructor in all Arts and sciences and Pennsylvania Gazette," first issued December 28, 1728.

perhaps under the Spacious Shelter of a Mushroom; and the dying Sage addresses himself to them after the following Manner.

"Friends and Fellow-Citizens; I perceive the longest life must have an End; The Period of mine is now at Hand; Neither do I repine at my Fate, since my great Age is become a Burden to me; and there is nothing New to me under the Sun. The Changes and Evolutions I have seen in my Country, the manifold private Misfortunes to which we are all liable, and the fatal Diseases incident to our Race, have abundantly taught me this Lesson, that no Happiness can be secure or lasting, which is placed in things which are out of our Power. Great is the Uncertainty of Life! a whole Brood of our Infants perished in a Moment by a keen Blast: shoals of our straggling Youth have been swept into the Waves by an unexpected Breeze: What wasteful Deluges have we suffered from a sudden Shower? Our strongest Holds are not Proof against a Storm of Hail; and even a dark Cloud damps the stoutest Heart.

"I have lived in the first Age, and conversed with Insects of a larger size, and stronger Make, and (I must add) of greater Virtue, than can any boast of in the present Generation. I must conjure you to give yet further Credit to my latest Words, when I assure you, that yonder Sun, which now appears *Westward* beyond the Waters, and seems not to be far distant from the Earth, in my remembrance stood in the Middle of the Sky, and shot his Beams directly down upon us. The World was much more enlightened in those Ages, and the Air much warmer. Think it not Dotage in me if I affirm, That Glorious Being moves. I saw his first Setting-out in the *East*; and I began my Race of Life near the Time when he began his immense Career. He has for several Ages advanced along the Sky with vast Heat and unparalleled Brightness; but now by his Declension, and a sensible Decay (more especially of Late) in his vigour, I foresee that all Nature must fall in a little Time, and that the Creation will be buried in darkness in less than a Century of Minutes.

"Alas my Friends! How did I once flatter myself with the hopes of abiding here for ever! How magnificent are the Cells that I hollowed out for myself! What Confidence did I repose in the Firmness and Spring of my Joints, and in the Strength of my Pinions! *But I have lived enough to Nature and even to Glory*: Neither will any of you whom I leave behind have equal Satisfaction in Life, in the Dark, declining Age which I see is already begun."

Thus far this agreeable unknown writer; too agreeable, we may hope, to remain always conceal'd. The fine allusion to the Character of JULIUS CAESAR, whose words he has put into the Mouth of this illustrious Son of *Hypanis*, is perfectly just and beautiful, and aptly points out the Moral of this inimitable Piece, the Design of which would have been quite perverted, had

a virtuous Character, a Cato or a Cicero, been made choice of to have been turned into Ridicule. Had this Life of a Day been represented as employed in the exercise of Virtue, it would have had equal Dignity with a Life of any Limited Duration; and according to the exalted Sentiments of SULLY, would have been preferable to an Immortality, filled with all the Pleasures of Sense, if void of those of a higher Kind. But as the Views of this vain-glorious Insect were confined within the narrow Circle of his existence, as he only boasts the magnificent Cells he has built, and the Length of Happiness he has enjoyed, he is the proper Emblem of all such Insects of the Human Race; whose Ambition does not extend beyond the like narrow limits; and notwithstanding the Splendour they appear in at present, they will no more deserve the Regard of Posterity than the Butterflies of the last Spring. In vain has History been taken up in describing the numerous Swarms of this mischievous Species which has infested the Earth in the successive Ages: Nor is it worth the enquiry of Virtuesoses, whether the Rhine or the Adige may not perhaps swarm with them at present, as much as the Banks of Hypanis; or whether the Silver Rivulet, the Thames may not show a spacious Mole-Hill, covered with inhabitants of the like dignity and Importance. The busy Race of Beings, attached to these fleeting Enjoyments, are indeed all of them engaged in the Pursuit of Happiness: And it is owing to their imperfect Notions of it, that they stop so far short in their Pursuit. The present Prospect of Pleasure seems to bound their Views; and the more distant Scenes of Happiness that will open to their Sight, when what they now propose shall be attained, do not yet strike their Imagination. It is great Stupidity (or Thoughtlessness) not to perceive, that the Happiness of Rational Natures is inseparably connected with Immortality. Creatures only endued with Sense, may, in a low Sense be reputed Happy so long as their Sensations are pleasing; and if these pleasing Sensations are commensurate to the Time of their Existence, their measure of Happiness is compleat. But such Beings as are endued with Thought and Reflection, cannot be made Happy by any limited Term of Happiness, how great soever its duration may be. The more exquisite and more valuable their enjoyments are, the more painful must be the Thought that they are to have an End; and this Pain of Expectation must be continually encreasing the nearer that End approaches. And if these Beings are themselves immortal, and yet insecure of the Continuance of their Happiness, the Case is far worse; since an eternal Void Delight, if not to say a State of Misery, must succeed. It would here be of no moment, whether the Time of their Happiness were measured by Days or Hours, by Months or by Periods of the most Inconceivable length. These swiftly flowing Streams bear no proportion to the Ocean of Infinity, where they finish their Course: The longest Duration of Finite Happiness avails nothing when it

is past; nor can the Memory of it have any other Effect, than to render a perpetual pining after Pleasures never to return. And since Virtue is the only Pledge and Security of a Happy Immortality, the Folly of sacrificing it to any Temporal Advantages, how important soever they may appear, must be infinitely Great, and cannot but leave behind it an eternal Regret.¹

I am Sir, Yours &c.

His political
Essays.

The Revolution drew Franklin deep into politics, and he produced numerous political writings, in which he at first endeavored to persuade the people that they should desist from warfare and patiently await an amicable settlement of their grievances, but after the outbreak of the war he lent his pen and his influence to the success of his countrymen. His political writings differed from many others of that class in that they were characterized by moderation, tolerance and humor—a philosophical absence of all churlishness or rancour.²

The

Franklin throughout his life was an indefatigable contributor of essays to the magazines and periodicals both at home and in England and France. During his residence in the latter country he wrote his *Bagatelles*, as his contribution to the amusement of the gatherings in the Salon of Madame Helvetius at Auteil, and of Madame Brillon at Moulin Joli. These included "The Story of the Whistle"; "The Handsome and Deformed Leg"; "The Morals of Chess," and "The Dialogue between Franklin and the Gout." All of these exhibit a lightness of touch, a grace of expression, a sparkle of wit, which we may attribute to French influence. Among them was "The Ephemera," which I shall insert, for, compared with the earlier essay on the same subject already quoted, it marks the evolution in Franklin's style, which is noticeable in all his later writings. How lengthy and tedious appears the first essay after reading the following treatment of the same theme! The contrast is remarkable as showing the stylistic evolution which is possible even in the years of one writer. It exemplifies the suddenness

¹ *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 4-11, 1735.

² Among Franklin's political essays and pamphlets are the following:—"A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain"; "Plain Truth"; "A Dialogue between X, Y and Z concerning the present state of affairs in Pennsylvania"; "Remarks on a Protest"; "Rules for Reducing a Great Empire to a Small One"; "An Edict of the King of Prussia"; "A Comparison of Great Britain and America as to Credit in 1777"; "A Catechism relating to the English National Debt," etc.

with which our literary style emerged from verbosity and obscurity into the artistic conciseness and clearness which have become its chief charms.

“To Madame Brillon, of Passy.

You may remember, my dear friend, that when we spent that happy day in the delightful garden and sweet society of the Moulin Joli, I stopped a little in one of our walks, and stayed some time behind the company. We had been shown numberless skeletons of a kind of little fly, called an ephemera, whose successive generations, we were told, were bred and expired within a day. I happened to see a living company of them on a leaf, who appeared to be engaged in conversation. You know I understand all the inferior animal tongues. My too great application to the study of them is the best excuse I can give for the little progress I have made in your charming language. I listened through curiosity to the discourse of these little creatures; but as they, in their national vivacity, spoke three or four together, I could make but little of their conversation. I found, however, by some broken expressions that I heard now and then, they were disputing warmly, on the merit of two foreign musicians, one a *cousin*, the other a *moscheto*; in which dispute they spent their time, seemingly as regardless of the shortness of life as if they had been sure of living a month. ‘Happy people!’ thought I; ‘you are certainly under a wise, just and mild government, since you have no public grievances to complain of, nor any subject of contention but the perfections and Imperfections of foreign music.’ I turned my head from them to an old grey-headed one, who was single on another leaf, and talking to himself. Being amused with his soliloquy, I put it down in writing, in hopes it will likewise amuse her to whom I am indebted for the most pleasing of all amusements, her delicious company and heavenly harmony.

‘It was,’ said he, ‘the opinion of learned philosophers of our race, who lived and flourished long before my time, that this vast world, The Moulin Joli, could not itself exist more than eighteen hours; and I think there was some foundation for that opinion, since by the apparent motion of the great luminary that gives life to all nature, and which in my time has evidently declined considerably towards the ocean at the end of our earth, it must then finish its course, be extinguished in the waters that surround us, and leave the world in cold and darkness, have necessarily producing universal death and destruction. I lived seven of these hours, a great age, being no less than four hundred and twenty minutes of time. How very few of us continue so long! I have seen generations born, flourish and expire. My present friends are the children and grandchildren of the friends of my youth, who are now, alas, no more! And I must soon follow them; for, by the course of nature, though

still in health, I cannot expect to live above seven or eight minutes longer. What now avails all my toil and labor, in amassing honey-dew on this leaf, which I cannot live to enjoy? What the political struggles I have been engaged in, for the good of my compatriots, inhabitants of this bush, or my philosophical studies for the benefit of our race in general! for, in politics, what can laws do without morals? Our present race of emphemerae will in a course of minutes become corrupt, like those of other and older bushes, and consequently as wretched. And in philosophy how small our progress! Alas! art is long, and life is short! My friends would comfort me with the idea of a name, they say I shall leave behind me; and they tell me I have lived long enough to nature and to glory. But what will fame be to an ephemera who no longer exists? And what will become of all history in the eighteenth hour, when the world itself, even the whole Moulin Joli, shall come to its end, and be buried in universal ruin?'

To me after all my eager pursuits, no solid pleasure now remains, but the reflection of a long life spent in meaning well, the sensible conversation of a few good lady emphemerae, and now and then a kind smile and a tune from the ever amiable *Brillante*.

B. FRANKLIN."¹

Franklin's
contribution
to our
literature.

Franklin made familiar to his fellow Americans the wit, and grace and stylistic beauties of the English essayists. Without conscious effort on his part he introduced into his writings a new American note of democracy, straightforward common sense and shrewd, kindly humor. It was by these characteristics in his works that he won for American letters the first recognition in England and on the Continent,² and these same qualities have won for him the first place among the earlier writers of American essays.

The Political
Essayists.

Many of Franklin's political essays were influential in their day but are now forgotten. The same fate has befallen the bulk of the political writings of the Revolution, and those which are remembered seem to be more interesting as history than as literature. Nevertheless some of the best and most representative of American essays were inspired by the political events of the periods of the Revolution and Reconstruction.

¹ Works. Edited by Jared Sparks. Vol. 2, pp. 177-179.

² "Father Abraham's Address" was translated into French, German, Spanish, Italian and Russian, and into various European dialects; it has been frequently reprinted in many languages. Cf. *Benjamin Franklin as a Man of Letters* by John Bach McMaster, p. 128.

During these years a war of words was fought to the finish, and in fervor, party spirit and clashing opinions rivalled the actual conflicts on the battlefields. The political essays fall into two divisions, some appearing in the newspapers while others were given to the public in pamphlet form. These are so numerous that a whole volume might well be devoted to their study. I have chosen to consider a few representative writers, whose political essays have a literary interest.

John Dickinson. In the *Pennsylvania Chronicle* for December 2, 1767, appeared the first of a series of twelve essays (the last appearing in February 15, 1768), known as the "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies," the work of John Dickinson. Of these it has been said that "no other serious Essays of the Revolutionary era quite equalled the Farmer's Letters in literary merit.¹ Dickinson assumed the guise of a plain farmer and in the first letter so described himself as to win a fellow-feeling and interest from his readers, whom, in the course of the series he admonishes to obtain relief but to maintain loyalty to their sovereign. "Let us," he said, "behave like dutiful children, who have received unmerited blows from a beloved parent. Let us complain to our parent; but let our complaints speak at the same time the language of affection and veneration. . . . Though your devotion to Great Britain is the most affectionate, yet you can make proper distinctions; and know what you owe to yourselves as well as to her."²

These essays met with an immediate approval and popularity, were republished in nearly all the American newspapers,³ and were issued in pamphlet form. Within the first year they were published in London and Dublin with a Preface by Franklin, and in the following year they were issued in France. London periodicals reviewed them and the Whigs endorsed them heartily in the following notice quoted from the *Monthly Review*.

"We have, in the letters now before us, a calm yet full enquiry into the rights of the British Parliament, lately assumed, to tax the American colonies; the unconstitutional nature of which

¹ *The Literary History of the American Revolution*, by Moses Coit Tyler, New York and London. 1897. Vol. 1, p. 236.

² *The Writings of John Dickinson, 1764-1774*. Edited by Paul Leicester Ford, Philadelphia, 1895.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

attempt is maintained in a well-connected chain of close and manly reasoning. . . . When we review a performance well written, and founded upon laudable principles, if we do not restrain ourselves to a general approbation, which may be given in a few words, the article will contain more from the author of it than from ourselves; this, if any excuse is needful for enabling our Readers, in some measure to judge for themselves, is pleaded as an apology for our copious extracts from these excellent letters." ¹

The Tory view was expressed in the *Critical Review* as follows:—

"The work before us is seditious in its principles, superficial in its execution, and tending to the perdition of the country for which its author is so furious an advocate." ²

John Dickinson by these essays and other political writings ³ won for himself the name of "Penman of the Revolution," and has been termed the greatest colonial essayist.⁴ It is true that for setting forth his precepts of moderation in a style, clear, concise and pleasing he deserves remembrance and praise.

Another writer to assume the character of a *Farmer*, Samuel Seabury. but on the Loyalist side, was Samuel Seabury, who wrote a series of essays over the signature of "Westchester Farmer," opposing from a farmer's standpoint the measures adopted by the Continental Congress, and prophesying calamity if the attitude of the Americans toward England were not changed.

—Of all the Loyalist essayists, Seabury easily ranks first. Though history has proved the falsity of his logic and the futility of his purpose, his pamphlets remain readable and interesting. His language was forceful, genuine English; his style scintillated with cutting epithets, quick satire and well-timed humor; his arguments were brilliant and to the point. The reader soon determines the reason for the influence which these essays exerted in their own time.⁵

¹ The *Monthly Review*, Vol. LIX, p. 18.

² The *Critical Review*, Vol. XXVI, p. 62.

³ Dickinson drafted the "Resolutions in Relation to the Stamp Act," the "Declaration of Rights," "The Petition to the King," and wrote the "Essay on the Constitutional Power of Great Britain over the Colonies in America," the "Address of Congress to the Inhabitants of the Province of Quebec," the "Declaration by the Representatives of the United Colonies of North America, setting forth the causes and necessity of their taking up arms," and the first draft of the "Articles of Confederation."

⁴ *Magazine of American History*. Vol. X, p. 223.

⁵ Other Loyalist essayists were Joseph Galloway, Daniel Leonard, Joseph Stansbury and Jonathan Odell.

Thomas
Paine.

Thomas Paine; as a political essayist, succeeded John Dickinson when the latter's popularity began to diminish in his own times. Opposed to the moderation of Dickinson, Paine became the great literary agitator of the Revolution. On January 9, 1776, Paine published his *Common Sense*, a document unadorned by literary graces, but with a style well fitted to its content, powerful and wonderful in the effect which it wrought upon the minds of the common people, whom, by its homely, blunt reason and strong patriotic principles, it reached and influenced more potently than any skilful and ornate production could have done. In December, 1776, during the darkest hours of the Revolution, Paine began to issue a series known as the *Crisis*. It was the force and power of such expressions as the following which made the works of Thomas Paine rank as classics of their kind.

"These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph." ¹

"Our union, well and wisely regulated and cemented, is the cheapest way of being great—the easiest way of being powerful, and the happiest invention in government which the circumstances of America can admit of. . . . I ever feel myself hurt when I hear the union, that great palladium of our liberty and safety, the least irreverently spoken of. It is the most sacred thing in the constitution of America, and that which every man should be most proud and tender of. Our citizenship in the United States is our national character. Our citizenship in any particular State is only our local distinction. By the latter we are known at home, by the former to the world. Our great title is AMERICANS." ²

Other
Political
Essayists.

These men, Dickinson, Seabury and Paine were the greatest of the essayists whose contributions cover the years of actual warfare. There were others whose works seemed important in their own days, but whose literary fame has been less enduring. Samuel Adams contributed a great mass of political essays to various newspapers over various sig-

¹ *The Political Writings of Thomas Paine*, Boston, 1870. Vol. I, p. 75.

² *Ibid.*, p. 259.

natures,¹ and these fulfilled their author's intention that they should be read by many but recognized by few as his work. They were of great interest and widely popular at the time they appeared. John Adams published in the *Boston Gazette* in 1765 a series of essays inspired by the enforcement of the Stamp Act. Later, in 1775, he wrote a series of essays over the signature "Novanglus,"² in reply to the brilliant essays of the Loyalist, Daniel Leonard, who as "Massachusettensis," was upholding the Tory principles. The essays of "Novanglus" were widely read and published in England and on the Continent. They were strong in argument, but exhibit imperfections and weaknesses in style and method.

The The American political essays of the period of which
Federalist. this chapter treats reached their highest expression in the series known as the *Federalist*. No sooner was the Revolutionary controversy ended than a new one began, for the adoption of the Constitution was preceded by long and spirited debate. On the side of the established government were Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry and Samuel Adams, and advocating the adoption of the constitution were James Madison, John Jay and Alexander Hamilton as leaders, supported by John Adams, George Washington, Thomas Paine, Albert Gallatin, John Marshall and Joseph Story. It was Madison, Jay and Hamilton who voiced the sentiments of their party in eighty-five short essays³ which became known as the *Federalist*. Over the common signature of "Publius" these three men presented their forceful arguments in favor of the Constitution, and in doing so gave utterance to statements universal and lasting in their application. Their style was so clear as to be easily comprehended by every citizen to whom they were addressed. At the same time, it is a style far removed from that of the colonial writers. The men who wrote the *Federalist* were no longer provincials. They were American statesmen and stood shoulder to shoulder with the world's foremost thinkers and writers, as is manifested in a style marked by a rhythmical balance, and a purity and polish matching that of the best English writers, but at the

¹ His disguises have never yet been numbered. He wrote over the signatures of "Alfred," "A Son of Liberty," "A Bostonian," "An Imperialist," "A," "A. B.," "E. A.," "Z," "Populus," "Sincerus," etc.

² *Boston Gazette*, January 23—April 17, 1775.

³ First published in the *Independent Gazeteer* of New York, 1787-1788.

same time exhibiting the positiveness and directness which characterizes all our great constitutional documents as *American*. It is Johnsonian English—invigorated and freshened by a new atmosphere.

Other Essays The appearance of so many excellent political
of the period. essays in a period devoted to strife and confusion is not surprising, but it seems remarkable that the same season of *Sturm und Drang* should also have produced a large mass of the literature of entertainment. It is hard to draw the line between the two classes of writings, for at this time there were authors who devoted their talents to the furtherance of the patriotic cause, and at the same time produced other literature which was entirely independent of the Revolutionary movement. It is customary to believe that a period of warfare or political unrest must be an era of aesthetic stagnation, but the converse is often true, for the same emotional quickening which moves a nation to a great political upheaval, arouses and stimulates men to renewed intellectual efforts. Thus we are able to account for the more purely literary essays which this period produced. It is true that many of these essays seem crude and immature, but this is not so surprising as the fact that such writings were attempted at all in times so unfavorable to art and culture. Among many inferior essayists, the works of a few stand out as worthy of notice and remembrance. Three of these essayists, Francis Hopkinson, Philip Freneau and John Trumbull won an enduring fame as the great Whig satirists of the Revolution; but in the field of the Essay, they also deserve mention.

Francis Hopkinson. Francis Hopkinson's first essay won more distinction than usually crowns a young man's first attempts, for, having been written in competition for the prize medal offered by John Sargent of London to the graduate of the College of Philadelphia who should write the best essay on the subject "Reciprocal Advantage of a Perpetual Union between Great Britain and her American Colonies," Hopkinson's essay, with three others, was published both in Philadelphia and London. His political writings, many of them in verse, are well known to students of American literature. Many of his prose writings are in the form of brief and disjointed satirical efforts, but he was, during his entire life, a devotee of art, with a zeal for reform, especially in education, apropos of which he published an admirable satirical essay, *Modern Learning Exemplified by a*

Specimen of a College Examination,¹ in which he burlesqued the contemporary methods of examination. Many of the essays which Hopkinson contributed to the newspapers were unsigned² and it is chiefly through the medium of his own collection of his miscellaneous essays that we are able to identify them. In his more serious vein he wrote *An Improved Plan of Education*, *The Ambiguity of the English Language* and *On Adversity*. In the manner of the *Spectator* was the series known as "The Old Bachelor." Hopkinson's greatest excellence was in his playful, satirical effects. Even in his essays, it is the ingenuity and odd conceits rather than any grace of expression, which delights the reader.

Philip Freneau. A more bitter satirist was Philip Freneau, remembered chiefly as America's first poet. Freneau was a prolific journalist, and in the capacity of contributor or editor, wrote many essays for various newspapers and journals.³ The prose style of Freneau was clear and unaffected, and free of the pedantry of many of his fellow-essayists. Among the best of his essays were his *Letters by Robert Slender, O.S.M.*⁴ from which I quote extracts of his "Advice to Young Authors." X ✓

"In a country, which two hundred years ago was peopled only by savages, and where the government has ever, in effect, since the first establishment of the white men in these parts, been no other than republican, it is really wonderful there should be any polite original authors at all in any line, especially when it is considered that according to the common course of things, any particular nation or people must have arrived to, or rather passed their meridian of opulence and refinement, before they consider the professors of the fine arts in any other light than a nuisance to the community. This is evidently the case in our age and country; all you have to do then, my good friends, is to graft your authorship upon some calling, or support drooping genius by the assistance of some mechanical employment in the same manner as the helpless ivy takes hold of the vigorous oak,

¹ *Miscellaneous Essays and Occasional Writings of Francis Hopkinson*, Philadelphia. 1792. Vol. II, p. 349-422.

² He wrote for the *Pennsylvania Gazette* (1774-1776), the *New Jersey Chronicle* and the *Pennsylvania Packet*.

³ *The United States Magazine* (1779); *The Freeman's Journal; or the North American Intelligencer* (1781-1789), *The National Gazette* (1791-1793); *The Jersey Chronicle* (1795-1796); *The Time-Piece; and Literary Companion* (1797-1798); *The Pennsylvania Packet and Daily Advertiser* (1782-1788).

⁴ "One of the Swinish Multitude."

and cleaves to it for support—I mean to say in plain language that you may make something by weaving garters or mending old nails, when an Epic would be your destruction.”

“As to those Authors who have lately exported themselves from Britain and Ireland, and boast that they have introduced the Muses among us since the conclusion of the late war, I really believe them to be a very good-natured set of gentlemen, notwithstanding they, in the course of the last winter, called me *Poetaster* and *scribbler* and some other names still more unsavory.

They are however excusable in treating the American authors as inferior; a political and literary independence of their nation being two very different things—the first was accomplished in about seven years, the latter will not be completely effected, perhaps, in many centuries. It is my opinion, nevertheless that a duty ought to be laid upon all imported authors, the net proceeds of which should be appropriated to the benefit of real American writers, when become old and helpless, and no longer able to wield the pen to advantage.”

John Trumbull. The third satirist, John Trumbull, was early in life, so inspired with enthusiasm for the English essayists, that during his senior year in Yale College, he attempted a series of essays in the tone of Addison and Steele. These essays, with the title of “The Meddler,” were contributed to the *Boston Chronicle*,¹ and in them Trumbull censured certain social and educational errors of his day, and at the same time endeavored to provide entertainment and diversion for his readers. The fifth essay of the series introduced “The Schemer” who added liveliness and humor to the collection. Trumbull’s gift of satire which he was later to devote to the patriot’s cause became evident even in these early essays. The third of the series² is an example of this satirical trend. It purports to be an advertisement provided for a young woman who had conducted four annual campaigns for a husband.

“Advertisement,
To be Sold at Public Vendue,
The whole Estate of
Isabella Sprightly, Toast and Coquette,
(Now retiring from Business).

Imprimis, all the Tools and Utensils necessary for carrying on the Trade, viz. Several bundles of Darts and Arrows, well-pointed and capable of doing great execution; A considerable

¹ 1769–1770.

² *The Boston Chronicle*, October 23–26, 1769.

quantity of Patches, Paint, Brushes and Cosmetics, for plastering, painting and whitewashing the face; a complete set of caps, a la mode a Paris, of all sizes from five to fifteen inches in height; With several dozens of Cupids, very proper to be stationed on a ruby lip, a diamond eye or a roseate cheek.

Item, as she proposes by certain ceremonies to transform one of her humble servants into an husband, and keep him for her own use, she offers for sale, Florio, Daphnis, Cynthio and Cleanthes, with several others, whom she won by a constant attendance on business during the space of four years. She can prove her indisputable right thus to dispose of them, by certain deeds of gifts, bills of sale, and attestations, vulgarly called love-letters, under their own hands and seals. They will be offered very cheap for they are all of them either broken-hearted, consumptive or in a dying condition. Nay, some of them have been dead this half year, as they declare and testify in the above-mentioned writings.

N.B. Their Hearts will be sold separately."

The series abounds in sparkling sayings and pointed epigrams, one of which I quote from the last essay, as a prose illustration of the same tendencies which made his poem *M'Fingal* so popular.

"There is no figure more employed by the present race of wits and satirists than the Periphrasis, or in modern language, the circumbendibus. To call a man a hog, is by no means allowable but if we exalt the expression, and say he is that animal before which we are commanded not to throw pearls, it becomes extremely witty, polite and delicate, and may be used by a Doctor of Divinity with the greatest facility and pleasure."¹

His next series of essays "The Correspondent" appeared in *The Connecticut Journal and New Haven Post Boy*. These also were framed after the Spectator style, and like his models, he succeeded in concealing his serious purpose of mending the manners and morals of his readers under the playfulness of his expressions. In these essays, Trumbull ridiculed the dogmatic writers of his day, and one number was aimed at disclosing the hypocrisy of certain avowed philanthropists and Christians whose chief source of wealth was the slave trade. A second series of "The Correspondent" appeared in the same paper in 1773 and 1774.²

¹ *The Boston Chronicle*, January, 18-22, 1772.

² Trumbull also wrote "An Essay on the Use and Advantages of the Fine Arts," delivered at the Yale commencement in 1770. Moses Coit Tyler mentions a series of seven "Speculative Essays" but these are only available in manuscript. cf. *Literary History of the American Revolution*, Vol. 2, p. 211.

Trumbull's fame as a satirist in verse has diverted the attention of the average reader from his prose writings, but his essays deserve a special place in the study of the Essay in American literature, for they exhibit an urbanity of style, a perspective of vision, and a scholarly moderation not traceable in any previous American essays, but distinctive of the period that was to follow.

Charles
Brockden
Brown.

Another writer of this period who won fame in a field other than that of the essay was Charles Brockden Brown, the first American novelist. Brown, at various items in his life, was a writer of essays, contributing "The Rhapsodist" to the *Columbian Magazine* in 1789, and various essays to *The Weekly Magazine of Original Essays, Fugitive Pieces and Interesting Intelligence*, in 1798 and 1799. Later in his life, he wrote essays for various periodicals which he edited,¹ and among them many reviews which aimed to educate the middle classes and cultivate among them a taste for serious literature.

Joseph
Dennie, the
Lay Preacher.

Among the many writers whose essays were subordinate to their accomplishments in other departments of literature, it is pleasant to find in this period one man who is remembered solely as an essayist. One of the most successful American journalists of his day was Joseph Dennie, the "Lay Preacher," which appropriate title was first assumed by him because of an incident in his early life. Dennie had been inclined to make the ministry his profession, but gave it up, as he said, "because of its starchedness of thinking and behaviour." However, while reading law in New Hampshire, he was called upon to read the liturgy and lay sermons during several months when the Episcopal church of his town was without a pastor. Growing weary of reading other men's sermons, he began to add short paragraphs of his own, and at length ventured to preach lay sermons which were entirely original. Later he was severely criticised for so doing and eventually he turned from both theology and law and became a man-of-letters.

In 1793 he wrote for the *New Hampshire Journal*; or *The Far-*

¹ *The Monthly Magazine and American Review*. New York. 1779-1780. *The American Review and Literary Journal for the Year*. New York, 1801. *The Literary Magazine and American Register*. Philadelphia, 1803-1807. *The American Register or General Repository of History, Politics and Science*. Philadelphia, 1806-1810.

mer's *Museum*,¹ a series of essays known as "The Farrago." These were witty and well written and his fame as their author contributed to his later success. In 1796, Dennie became editor of *The Farmer's Weekly Museum* mentioned above, which under his skilful management, despite an occasional financial crisis, attained great success and popularity. From the same press, Dennie published the first volume of "The Lay Preacher." In explanation of the title the following Preface is inserted in the later collection of the Lay Sermons made by John E. Hall.²

"As the title of this work may appear ludicrous to some, and be obscure to others; as may start at the word *Preacher*, and may sneer at a *Lay* man tampering with theology—it is proper to state that this is not a volume of sermons. It is a series of essays, modelled after the designs of Addison and the harmless and playful levity of Oliver Goldsmith. The mottoes are copied from the oriental writings; but they are either a moral lesson, an economical precept, or a biographical picture. The topics to which they are prefixed are didactic, descriptive, or airy as the gravity or the humour of the hour prompted. On the fenced and walled, and hallowed ground of religion, the author has never presumed to trench."

It was by these *Lay Sermons* that Dennie won so great a reputation in his own day and deserves mention in any study of American essays. The *Sermons* are certainly unique. Dennie seemed to have a gift of choosing from the Bible a text that was remarkably appropriate to his subject and then producing a "sermon" which was *not* a sermon, but a brief, pointed essay, with gravity and lightness, wisdom and wit so mingled that the reader is often at a loss to know whether the author meant to censure or amuse. With admirable skill he avoided all grounds for a charge of irreverence in his use of Bible themes, never treating them with levity, but letting them illuminate his own meditations, and applying them to the life of his own times in a manner that was novel and interesting. As illustration I shall insert two of his Lay Sermons.

On Meditation.

"Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." Psalms, IV-4.

Having, in my last speculation, attempted to describe some

¹ Published at Walpole, New Hampshire, 1793-1797. In 1795 Dennie contributed another series of "The Farrago" to *The Tablet*, published in Boston.

² *The Lay Preacher* by Joseph Dennie. Collected and arranged by John E. Hall, Philadelphia, 1817.

of the delights of study, in this paper it is proposed to consider the true use of retirement. Between them there should be a perpetual alliance: nay, they are not only neighbouring and friendly powers, but they are familiar connexions. Amiable, interesting and lovely sisters! if your worthy admirer be attracted by the riches of one, he will quickly be delighted with the pensiveness of the other. Study will give him all her books, and retirement conduct him to all her bowers. In no ramble, will he experience more delight than when he roves through the healthful woods, or saunters through the tranquil cloister, with retirement on his right hand and study on his left. Though their guise is exceedingly modest, though their conversation has no resemblance to loquacity, though their best attire is from no other wardrobe than that of sweet simplicity, still they will always gain more regard from the wiser, than all the pageants of the pompous, and all the plumage of the vain.

The royal Psalmist, from whose divine odes, I have transcribed my text, was himself a memorable example of the utility of retirement, reflection and self communion. It will be remembered that he was a warrior, a statesman, a man of business and a man of the world. In these various characters, though he often acquitted himself exceedingly well, yet unfortunately, in some flagrant instances, we perceive how much he was tainted by the infection of the world. But when he shuts his eyes against the glare of ambition, and the gaze of beauty, when he ceases to touch the harp of fascination, and forsakes the cabinet and the camp, then we recognize, at once, the scholar, the philosopher and the poet. In the strong holds at En-gedi, he is a mere soldier; in the palace of Saul, a servile musician; in the cave at Adullam, a skulking fugitive; and in the forests of Hareth, an unhappy exile. But when he tore himself away from the thralldom of care, the bustle of business and the din of Jerusalem, when he wandered away by *the brooks of the fields, or the plains of the wilderness*, when he retired to his chamber, and communed with his heart, then he formed those noble associations, and composed those exquisite performances, which will transmit his name with renown to the remotest posterity.

My Lord Bacon, Sir Walter Raleigh, Erasmus, Grotius, Mr. Addison and Mr Locke, together with a great multitude of illustrious men, have been deeply involved in the cares of public business, as well as engrossed by the meditations of the closet. But for the fairest portion of their glorious fame, how much are they indebted to the latter! While the chancery decrees of Sir Francis Bacon moulder away in the hands of some master of the rolls, the experiments of his study, and the essays of his wit, like certain exquisite paintings, grow brighter by time. While we peruse with still renewing pleasure, Raleigh's history of the world, his unlucky politics are scarcely regarded. Mr. Addison was secretary of state, and Grotius was an ambassador; but who

enquires for the despatches of the one, or is interested in the negotiations of the other? The fame of Erasmus, constantly immersed in the turmoil of his times, and engrossed by cares, civil and ecclesiastic, would have perished with the names of those miserable monks, whom he has derided, or those imperious princes whom he has courted. But by sometimes wisely withdrawing himself from the cabals of a court, and the polemics of the church, by meditating on horseback, and in his chamber, by avarice of time, by intenseness of application, and ardour of genius, he has filled *ten folios*, composed in the purest Latinity, where an indolent reader can find nothing too prolix, and where a critical reader can discover nothing to reprehend. The foolish politics of Addison are scarcely remembered even by his faction. The character of Locke, is painted with no other pencils than those of ridicule as a man of business, and the diplomacy of Grotius, and of Sir William Temple are *utterly contemned*; but their literary and philosophical works, the beauteous offspring of retirement and study, will continue to charm.

“Till Time, like him of Gaza, in his wrath,
Plucking the pillars that support the world,
In nature’s ample ruins lies entombed,
And midnight, universal midnight, reigns.”

Though in the text we are admonished to commune with ourselves, in our chamber, yet, it would be a very partial and narrow interpretation, if it were concluded that we could not meditate anywhere else. The secrecy of a closet, and the stillness of midnight, are, unquestionably, propitious to the powers of reflection. But other places and seasons may be selected for that salutary discipline, which the Psalmist recommends. It is a vulgar error to suppose, that retirement and contemplation are never to be found, except in a forest or desert, a cell or a cloister. In the thronged mart, and in the blaze of day, he who has inured himself to habits of abstraction, may commune with himself, as though he was in his chamber—Proofs of this abound in many a page in the records of literature. Some of the fairest displays of self-knowledge, some of the finest results of meditation, some of the sweetest fruits of retirement owed their appearance not to the tranquillity of sylvan groves. In many a metropolis with the din of commerce, and crowded with the throngs of nations *contemplation has had her fill*. Though a sublime poet, in a fit of rural enthusiasm has exclaimed,

Hide me from *Day’s* garish eye,

yet it would be alike dangerous and delusive to believe, that we cannot speculate at noon, as well as at night. In short, the choice of time or place is not essential, to the formation of habits of *self-sequestration*, and the acquisition of the precious power of withdrawing the mind from all external objects

As, in Dr. Johnson's phrase, I am often *wakefully disturbed* at midnight, and as I have not wholly forgotten my boyish attachment to woods and meadows, I acknowledge that I often commune with myself, in my chamber, by the banks of a romantic river, or in the recesses of a lonely forest. I have already speculated twice on the profit and pleasure producible by nocturnal hours, wisely employed, and rural rambles, judiciously directed. But for a period of no inconsiderable duration, I have often retired to rest at a vulgar hour, and have wholly exchanged the country for the city. Change of circumstances demanded new habits. Though but seldom I *wind slowly o'er the lea*; though the *glimmering landscape* but rarely fades before my sight; and my ears generally listen to other sounds than the *drowsy tinklings* of a shepherd's bell, yet it is my duty to reflect much, even in the midst of confusion. Accordingly, I commune with my own heart, in the crowd, and can be still, even in the street. I sermonize, in the suburbs, and find apt alliteration in an alley. I start a topic in High Street, and hunt it down as far as Southwark, or the Northern Liberties. I walk through the market place, as I once wandered in a wood; and while one is talking of his farm, and another of his merchandise, I listen to the suggestions of fancy, or invoke the cherub contemplation.

But to return to a more rigorous exposition of the text, and consider it merely as an exhortation to the tranquil exercise of our mental powers, in the retirement of the closet, I do not know whether in the pages of any philosopher, I could find a better lesson of salutary discipline. It is favourable to the culture of intellectual, as well as moral habits. He, who accustoms himself in closet meditations, will not only purify his heart, but correct his judgement, form his taste, exercise his memory, and regulate his imagination. Moreover, he then has an admirable opportunity to view the world, at a due distance, to form a deliberate estimate of life, to calculate, with precision, the proportion of his own powers, combined with those of other men, and having weighed himself; as it were in the "balance of sanctuary," to find new causes for regret, and new reasons for reformation.

To multitudes, solitude, retirement and reflection, appear in a form more horrid than the weird sisters in Shakespeare. The man of business, the man of pleasure, the votary of vanity, and the victim of lassitude, all sedulously shun those hours, which have been so nobly employed by philosophers, poets, hermits and saints. Dr. Young who has immortalized his self-communion, in one of the most original poems in our language, a poem not only of gorgeous metaphors, but of the most ardent piety, exclaims, with more than mortal enthusiasm,

Oh, lost to virtue, lost to manly thought,
Lost to the noblest sallies of the soul!
Who think it solitude to be alone,

Communion sweet! communion large and high!
Our reason, guardian angel, and our God! ¹

On Dissappointment.

"Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes."—Isaiah, V. 4.

Thus fares it with most of the vineyards of the world. Dressed by the vintager, they promise plausibly, as a courtier. In the season of maturity, what is the fruit? When we "looked" for perfection, we found our hopes mocked with wildness, crudity, bitterness, with fruit austere, as sloes; or sour, like the berries of the gadding barberry.

The poet Isaiah, for the prophet, no less than Homer, merits the title of bard, has beautifully allegorized the common disappointments of man. He describes his beloved as the proprietor of a vineyard in a champaign country. Well fenced, well planted, freed from stones, protected by a tower, and crowned by a wine press; such a vineyard might inspire the owner with the fondest expectations of pressing sweet fruit, and of drinking the purest nectar. Mortified Hebrew, I see thee walk away in anguish. At autumnal noon, thou hast met the vine dresser, and he has told thee of blight, and mildew, and caterpillar; that the grapes are wild, acid, their juice vinegar, that the vineyard is no better than a thistle field, and thy time and money wasted with no recompense—I hear thee in the bitterness of thy heart exclaim, "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" It is natural. Many a parent has spoken in the same language, when hearing of the sorry adventures of a prodigal son. Where men have lavished wealth, hours, affection, whether in rearing grapes, or offspring, if either prove *wild*, it is like a dart through the liver.

Wild grapes, in the sense which the prophet intends, are "as plenty as blackberries." Hoyden girls, forward boys, and dissipated men, are all wild grapes. Parents may dress, and school-masters prune as much as they please; all culture is in vain, where there is rottenness at root and heart.

The banks of many a western lake, and the savannahs of Georgia and Tennessee have been converted by land-jobbers into vineyards, more productive than those of Bordeaux or Burgundy. Emigrant and eager vintagers have "looked" for the fruit of their labours, and expected to behold high piled baskets, and flasks by the dozen. Such vineyards have yielded prodigiously; barren sand and bankruptcy have been the wild grapes, which set the speculator's teeth on edge. Very sour unpalatable fruit, too hard of digestion, even for an ostrich.

The French for a succession of ages, blest with fertile vineyards, and crowned with chaplets, were a merry people. In an evil

¹ *The Lay Preacher* by Joseph Dennie. Collected and arranged by John E. Hall, Esq. pp. 12-20.

hour, the rage of improvement urged them to grub up that mantling vine, which had so long proved—

“From storm a shelter, and from heat a shade.”

and to plant certain bastard slips, called the tree of liberty. Over the whole kingdom they threw a shade more mournful, than yew or cypress. Great expectations have been entertained of the fruit of these trees, but, it is said, noblemen and gentlemen of taste declare nothing can be more *wild*, and even the poor peasant shakes his head at the forced production and mawkish flavour of the fruit of liberty, and sighs for a grape or filbert, from the gardens of St. Cloud or the Thuilleries.¹”

Dennie's style has the defects of verbosity and occasional affectation, but it is never wearisome. It lacks the sparkle of Trumbull's epigrams, and the sententiousness of Franklin, but his essays were written with the earnest desire to elevate the literary taste of his contemporaries, and he deserves special notice in that, of all the writers yet considered, he was the first to devote *all* his talents to the production of essays.

“The
Portfolio.”

There is another interesting fact in connection with Joseph Dennie, for it was he who in the year 1800, established in Philadelphia the *Portfolio*, which was destined to live twenty-six years and worthily represent a new American departure in the field of periodicals. The first *Portfolio* was graced with this appropriate motto from Cowper—

. . . various that the mind
Of desultory man, studious of change,
And pleased with novelty, may be indulged.

This journal became a repository for contributions from many men prominent in literature, science and politics. So strongly Federalist in sentiment was it at one time that Jefferson's friends designated it “The Portable Foolery.” A study of its numbers reveals many names and facts interesting to the student of our American literature. Among its contributors were General Thomas Cadwallar, Charles Brockden Brown, Joseph Hopkinson, John Blair Linn, John Sanderson, Gouverneur Morris and Mrs. Sarah E. Hall. The “Letters from Silesia” by John Quincy Adams first appeared in the *Portfolio* and were afterwards printed in London and translated into German and French. Thomas Moore, during his visit to Philadelphia, became a friend of Dennie

¹ *The Lay Preacher* by Joseph Dennie. Collected and arranged by John E. Hall, Esq., pp. 93-96.

and a contributor to the *Portfolio*. Thus this periodical became one of the best of this period and endured well into the next.¹

Even the shorter lived and less popular magazines and journals show a decided improvement over those of the colonial period and reveal many interesting essays. It is to be regretted that the prevailing fashion

of signing such essays only by the name of the character assumed prevents us from identifying the authors of many essays which are unique and excellent. Among them I found two essays which are interesting as revealing the attitude of the writers of the period toward this form of writing. The first appeared in *The Massachusetts Magazine*; or *Monthly Museum of Rational Entertainment*,² and I quote an extract from it.

“Since the publication of the *Spectator*, by the celebrated Addison, in the beginning of the present century, a variety of periodical papers have appeared under different titles and signatures; many of them written with accuracy, containing excellent sentiments, not only amusing but instructive; tending to improve the morals and reform the manners of the times.—This mode of writing may be improved in such manner as to become highly advantageous: An essay may be penned and communicated to the public, in a periodical paper, by a person, who if he has abilities, may not have leisure for long and elaborate performances; and many persons, either through want of inclination, or being engaged in the business and active scenes of life, not having many leisure moments, will be more likely to read a short essay on any subject, than to sit down and peruse in course a lengthy dissertation, though well composed, dressed in an elegant and flowery diction, with all the beauties of language.”

The second of these essays was published in *The Weekly Magazine of Original Essays, Fugitive Pieces and Interesting Intelligence*.³

“It will be found, perhaps, that in all civilized nations, nothing has contributed more to the diffusion of knowledge than the works of their periodical writers. It is to the correct taste and labours of Addison that we must ascribe the emulation of intellectual elegance which now universally prevails in Great Britain. Before the appearance of the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, literature was confined to the school and the college. It was Addison who made

¹ It was excelled only by *The Anthology and Boston Review*, founded in Boston in 1803, and lasting to 1811.

² Boston, 1789. This essay is signed *The General Observer*.

³ Philadelphia. August 4, 1798, signed *The Wanderer*.

the avenues of learning easy of access, and inculcated with every blandishment of gentleness the desire of knowledge, who by the elegance of his compositions formed the taste of his readers, and by the solidity of his doctrine inspired them with virtue. . . .

If therefore, the labours of the periodical writers have been so successful in Europe, the hope may be cherished that an attempt of the same kind would be encouraged in America. It might be suggested that the deserved celebrity of preceding Essayists should rather preclude than invite competition. But the architect might as well desist from imitating the ichnography of a Jones and a Wren, because of the elegance of their structures, as the modern writer be deterred from communicating his thought in periodical papers to the world, because of the skill and felicity of his illustrious predecessors. Though originality be the first praise of genius, yet successful imitation is not without its merit."

Essays in
reformed
spelling.

In this period appeared *A Collection of Essays and Fugitive Writings* by Noah Webster, Jr.,¹ interesting to modern spelling reformers by reason of the fact that these essays are all written in "reformed" spelling, which the author thus advocates—

"Every possible reezon that could ever be offered for altering the spelling of wurds exists in full force; and if a gradual reform should not be made in our language, it will proof that we are less under the influence of reezon than our ancestors."²

I have examined and included in the Bibliography many odd volumes of essays which appeared in this period, but which were of unequal merit and not worthy of mention in the class with Franklin and the great political essayists and literary writers of these decades.

The essayists of our first American era have been obscured by the brilliancy of the period which followed. Nevertheless, when the storm and tempest of political ferment seemed fated to kill the struggling growth of our literary life, these writers cherished and cultivated the growing seeds of promise so carefully that they soon blossomed into the maturity and beauty of our national literature. It must be remembered that Irving, Cooper, Bryant, Emerson and Hawthorne were all born before this first period closed, and the first three were personally acquainted with some of the essayists considered in this chapter, whose lives and works must have been a contributory influence in the literature produced by their greater successors in the period which followed.

¹ Boston, 1790.

² *Ibid.*, The Preface.

CHAPTER III.

THE MODERN PERIOD.

The Modern Period prolific in the number of its Essayists.

Though the two periods already treated presented difficulties because the early American Essays were either scarce or indistinguishable, the modern era becomes a greater problem and perplexity by reason of the very abundance and variety of its unmistakable essays. During the Nineteenth Century our literary growth was as rapid and remarkable as our political progress. This century produced so many hundreds of essayists of unequal merit, that it is impracticable to make an analytic study of individual writers. But the American Essay developed into certain distinctive classes, and from the many, I have chosen to consider a few essayists representative of each class, whose work, by its quality or importance became a factor in our literary evolution. In the treatment of these writers I shall make no attempt at an exhaustive, critical study of their various works, but shall note results rather than means, remembering that this is a study not of individual writers, but of whatever each may have contributed to the development and character of the Essay as written in America. If one or two writers receive a more detailed study than the rest it is due to the fact that they stand as the most important representatives of their respective types.

Washington Irving, the first truly American writer.

Washington Irving is justly considered the first American writer of enduring eminence, for though, as we have seen, Franklin became famous on both sides of the Atlantic, it was interest in the man and his various achievements which secured a world-wide audience for his expressions in literature; and the other essayists whom we have already noted are of importance in the early history of the American essay but deserve no place in a study of real literature as represented in the Essay of the modern period.

Irving's essays mark a transition from the Addisonian type.

Irving was the first American essayist; in time—if we remember that he was born in 1783, the year which marked the final severance of the last tie which had bound us to Great Britain; in rank—for until his appearance on our literary horizon, no American author

of importance had eschewed all other effects and produced pure literature, free of argument, serious purpose and pedantry. Irving's work, while ranking as the first representative American literature may also be regarded as marking a definite transition in the field of the Essay, First, because in his hands, the American Essay ceased to be a mere imitation of English models; and secondly, because the passing of the Eighteenth Century type of newspaper Essay was achieved in his works. The first statement brings us upon debated ground; for some critics, both English and American, considered Irving's style as that of an English writer who occasionally chose American themes. But Irving, though influenced by the best traditions of England's literary art was also characteristically American, and the most popular of his works were those which could not have been the product of any other than his native soil. The English Essay of the Eighteenth Century was familiar to Irving "Salmagundi," and in his first writings he employed the Addisonian manner in the use of American subjects. The Periodical Essay with assumed signature which had been so much in vogue in the preceding period had not yet ceased to be popular, and Irving's first essays were published in the *New York Chronicle* in 1802 over the signature of Jonathan Oldstyle. Then appeared *Salmagundi*, written by Washington and William Irving and James Kirk Paulding. *Salmagundi* was a semi-monthly publication which ran for about twenty numbers, and Irving's contributions to it suggest those directions into which his art was soon to lead him. These papers, faithfully reproduced the atmosphere of the city and the times which they portray. Though marked by many affectations, the style is pleasant, and the spirit cannot fail to amuse. A whimsical indifference to praise or blame, a self-satisfied complacency, lively criticism and delicate humor are some of the means by which *Salmagundi* created a local sensation when it appeared, though its fame has been obliterated by the quality of Irving's later works.

The "Sketch Book" a collection of narrative essays.

It was with the *Sketch Book* that Irving formed an epoch in the history of our essays, for in this collection, he freed himself from the restrictions of the newspaper essays which had prevailed for so long a time, and set a new fashion of American narrative essays. The book is a collection of essays and short stories, but even the stories are pervaded by the Essay spirit, for in most

of them the interest is not that of an intricately unwinding plot but of the leisurely revelation of incidents which are contemplated, enjoyed and commented upon. In the *Sketch Book* are some essays which might have been written by the later Eighteenth Century English essayists, and the style of the whole book has not been surpassed in Nineteenth Century England, but it has many specific qualities which differentiate it from its English

predecessors. Whereas the motive of English periodical essayists had been to expose follies, to reform manners or instruct contemporaries, the *Sketch Book* was delightfully unmoral, and though marked by sentiment and deep feeling, its one aim was to please and entertain. Then too, the book, though it contains some classical essays dealing sympathetically with English scenes, has won a lasting popularity chiefly by those chapters which are exclusively American, and which contributed to our literature the beauty and romance of old legends of the land, in which it had up to this time been entirely lacking. Irving's works discovered for us the fascinating superstitions of the realm of Rip Van Winkle, the poetic charm of the Hudson, the alluring possibilities of an untried West and the traditions of our history in its making. Literature of this sort was a revelation to Europe which had looked upon America as a new land without legend, and it was an inspiration to his countrymen, who up to this time, had overlooked the fact that American literature could best thrive as a growth of its own American soil. With the good sense so characteristic of him, Irving did not limit himself to native themes, but devoted a good share of his writings to old-world subjects—English life, Spanish romances and records of the world's history, but even here he reveals the fact that it is new-world eyes which are beholding the old scenes. His humor, keen and penetrating but tolerant, is the result of a purely American point of view.

Irving's works are too much pervaded by an old fragrance of Eighteenth Century literature to be considered as truly representative American essays, if compared with those which achieved renown in the later development of our literary life. Irving rarely suggests or stimulates. There were heights yet unscaled which he never reached. But, when wearied with the stress and strain of the intervening years, posterity may find it pleasant to turn back to Irving and sur-

Its peculiarly
American
characteristics.

Irving's
limitations.

render once more to the rare charm of a simple and melodious style. By their happy combination of old and new, Irving's essays won for him a universality of distinction not usually awarded to a pioneer.

Irving's
influence as
a "promoter
of culture."

The well-merited approval with which Irving's works were received both at home and abroad, proved an important stimulus in lifting our literature above its provincialism. After him, in quick succession

throughout the century, there appeared those writers who made the history of real American letters. We are accustomed to look upon Irving as the pioneer essayist and short-story writer, but his influence upon his immediate successors lay in less definite and tangible lines, for contemporary imitators in his own particular field did not succeed in preserving the popularity of his Narrative Essay. It was rather the breadth of view, his far-reaching interest in a variety of subjects, his cosmopolitan qualities combined with a masterly ability to uplift as well as charm, that stimulated his successors. Irving was a promoter of culture, and it is not surprising to find that soon after his success, American writers began to develop a faculty for the criticism of

Irving's
attitude
toward
criticism.

literature as well as its creation. Of Irving's own temperate attitude toward criticism we have evidence in the following selection from an essay which appeared in his *Reviews and Miscellanies* entitled "Desultory

Thoughts on Criticism."

"Were every one . . . to judge for himself and speak his mind frankly and fearlessly, we should have more true criticism in the world than at present. Whenever a person is pleased with a work, he may be assured that it has good qualities. An author who pleases a variety of readers must possess substantial powers of pleasure; or in other words, intrinsic merits; for otherwise we acknowledge an effect and deny the same. The reader therefore should not suffer himself to be readily shaken from the convictions of his own feelings by the sweeping assertions of pseudo critics. The author he has admired may be chargeable with a thousand faults, but it is nevertheless beauties and excellencies that have excited his admiration, and he should recollect that taste and judgement are as much evinced in the perception of beauties among defects, as in a detection of defects among beauties. For my part, I honor the blessed and blessing spirit that is quick to discover and extol all that is pleasing and meritorious. Give me the honest bee, that extracts honey from the humblest weed but save me from the ingenuity of the spider, which traces its venom even in the midst of a flower garden."

No American criticism during the 17th and 18th Centuries.

Aside from a few reviews, there had been no real criticism in America during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, and though Irving and his contemporaries had evinced a somewhat desultory critical spirit, the Nineteenth Century was well advanced

before this tendency assumed noticeable importance. Irving's influence is distinctly traceable in the early prose works of Longfellow, but as a promoter of culture Longfellow did greater service than Irving, for having an academic training he was able to introduce and interpret much hitherto unknown European

Longfellow as a critical Essayist.

literature to his fellow-countrymen. We are so appreciative of Longfellow's place in poetry that his contributions to American criticism are seldom recog-

nized. After three years of travel in Europe, and with Irving's successful *Sketch Book* in mind, Longfellow, in 1829, admits that he is "writing a kind of 'Sketch Book' of scenes in France, Spain and Italy," and in 1834 and 1835 the book appeared with the title *Outre-Mer*. That the sketches contained in it bear all the hall-marks of the true Essay spirit is evident to the reader of the "Epistle Dedicatory," wherein Longfellow states—

"Perchance what I have written will be little to thy taste;—for it is little in accordance with a stirring spirit of the present age. If so, I crave thy forbearance for having thought that even the busiest mind might not be a stranger to those moments of repose, when the clock of time clicks drowsily behind the door, and trifles become the amusement of the wise and great."

This work and the later essays to which he gave the title "Drift-wood" are more than mere collections of narrative essays and travel chronicles, for it was the spirit of the Old World rather than its external characteristics which Longfellow interpreted for his countrymen. Those works contained literary papers, whose composition required a knowledge and breadth of culture that was rare in the American people previous to his appearance. There were but few, if any, of his contemporaries who could write intelligently on such subjects as "Ancient French Romances," "Frithiof's Saga" and "Anglo Saxon Literature." These papers, though not brilliantly critical, merit a place in the history of American criticism, especially as it is represented in the Essay, for though conveying instruction, they do it in a manner so attractive and so imbued with the gentle person-

ality of the writer that they never overstep the bounds of the Essay and merge into didactic formality.

The Critical Essayists.

This brings us to the dividing line which separates the Critical Essay from the larger school of criticism which is represented by the long literary analysis or extended book review. I have regarded as representative Critical Essayists only those writers who, in their criticism of others have interpreted literature as seen through their own temperaments, "Discovering old authors anew for themselves," and preserving in their appreciations the personal and suggestive elements by which we distinguish the Essay from the treatise.

Edgar Allan Poe as a critic of his contemporaries.

Longfellow's critical work had been chiefly on the side of appreciation, but criticism must detect faults as well as merit, and the critical essays of Edgar Allan Poe introduced the elements of ridicule, satire and disapproval. All these are necessary to criticism, but they should be the result of judgment based upon broader standards than those of the mere personal preference or caprice which often actuated Poe to take up his critical pen. Nevertheless he deserves credit for having added honest frankness of opinion to critical craftsmanship. Confining his criticism to his American contemporaries and particularly to the "Literati" of New York, it was inevitable that many of his estimates should prove incorrect. He was too close to his subjects in time and place to obtain a proper perspective, and this is especially evident in his depreciation of Longfellow, Cooper and Hawthorne. But on the other hand, Poe's insight has proved prophetic in many instances where time and posterity have verified his conclusions. If we exclude his unwarrantable praise of certain contemporary "Poetesses" and his angry cuts at his literary enemies, we must credit him with having performed a valuable service in exposing many literary impostors and in changing the then prevalent fashion of making criticism identical with puffery, though to do so was to make enemies for himself and retard his own material progress.¹

¹ Poe's Critical writings appear in the collected works. They include the series called *The Literati, Short Essays on Various American Authors*, the *Essays on Mrs. Browning, Macaulay, Lever, Marryat, Cockton and Dickens*, and the essays entitled *The Poetic Principle, The Rationale of Verse*, and the *Philosophy of Composition*.

Poe's best
Critical
Essays.

Poe's best legacy to criticism is embodied in the three essays entitled "The Poetic Principle," "The Rationale of Verse," and the "Philosophy of Composition." These careful studies into the art and aesthetics of authorship are more than mere critical essays. They are creative and interpretative literature.

No "school"
of American
criticism.

There is no so-called "school" of American criticism and a study of criticism as represented in American Essays is made difficult by the fact that, though many writers devoted some of their works to criticism, there was only one essayist in the past century who made criticism a life-work to the exclusion of all other forms of literary expression.

Edwin Percy
Whipple, a
professional
critic.

Edwin Percy Whipple was a professional critic. He says "many of the strongest minds of the age will leave no other record behind them than critical essays and popular speeches." Even he did not confine himself to purely literary themes, but chose such broadly ranged subjects as *Literature and Life*, *Character and Characteristic Men*, *Success and its Conditions*, *The Literature of the Age of Elizabeth*, and *Recollections of Eminent Men*. He brings a critical and interpretative but never an inventive faculty to bear upon all his subjects. Whipple represents a departure in style from the graciousness and flexibility of Addison, Irving and Lamb. His kinship is with Hooker, Bacon and Johnson. In his hands the Essay became more finished and formal. His work embodied the fast accumulating traits which differentiated our literature from that of England. Their distinctive *Americanisms* are evinced in the "massive good sense" which tempers the pages of all he wrote; in the emphasis laid upon grit and determination; in the scorn for sham and pretense, and in the moral earnestness which caused Whittier to say that Whipple wrote "with conscience always at his elbow and never sacrificed his real convictions for the sake of epigram." In criticism his most imitable contribution was his spirit of justice by which he represented both sides of all questions, and the tolerance which enabled him to see beyond the conventional in his search for motives.¹

¹ This tolerant spirit is beautifully exemplified in his essay on George Eliot.

Authors who
wrote both
Critical and
Personal
Essays.

James
Russell
Lowell.

Other critical essays of our literature are to be found in the works of writers who represent also the more purely personal type of Essay. Among the writers of both Personal and Critical Essays was James Russell Lowell, whose first prose work *Conversations on some of the Old Poets* revived the neglected dialogue essay, and in its sentimentality seems to be separated by a century from the virility of his later works. His *Fireside Travels* which appeared periodically in *Putnam's Monthly*, is a miscellaneous collection of descriptive, reminiscent and personal essays. Lowell's critical writings are contained in his *Among my Books* and *My Study Windows*. In range and diversity these exceed the subjects treated by Longfellow and Poe. With a zest for criticism he leads the way into unexplored fields of literature in England, Germany, France and Italy; and at the same time performs his best work in interpreting American incidents and authors. His was a catholic taste, accompanied by an independent insight. It is unfortunate that Lowell frequently allowed his personal preferences to limit his judgment, and that he often overlooks general merit in his exposition of particular faults. Thus we find him broadly interpretative in his praise but biased and prejudiced when he attempts to expose faults. His essay on Thoreau, for instance, remains one of the most misleading pieces of criticism in our literature, and, coming from so authoritative a source, it has done irremediable harm to its subject. Lowell's prose style is not that of the master artist. He is sometimes strikingly splendid in details of expression, but lacks the ability to sustain his art to the completed construction of a well-organized composition. His illustrations are sometimes more democratic than elegant.

George
William
Curtis.

Less critical and more personal are the essays of George William Curtis, whose two little volumes bearing the title *From the Easy Chair*, contain the essays with which for many years he interested the readers of *Harper's Magazine*. These are fragrantly suggestive of the Addisonian spirit, though so modern as to differ from Addison in subject and method. He treats of drama and song, authors past and present, bygone days and ways, follies and virtues, politics and religion—in brief, men, women and events so engage his attention that he deserves a place in the study of our Essays.

as an interpreter of Life, with loyalty to the old ideals of the essayists' art.

Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Thomas Wentworth Higginson has been a prolific writer of Critical and Personal Essays. His reminiscences of the great Nineteenth Century writers are of special value, and his critical studies are tolerant and illuminating.

William Dean Howells. William Dean Howells since the appearance of *Venetian Days* has ranked among our essayists. His *Modern Italian Poets* represents a formal and academic criticism without the personal note which becomes evident in his *Criticism and Fiction*, *My Literary Passions*, *Literary Friends and Acquaintances* and *Heroines of Fiction*.

The Transcendentalists. The distance is great between the "Easy Chair" Curtis and the strenuousness of the Transcendental essayists who like the writers just considered are to be classed as both critical and personal. These writers, associated as they were by a common purpose, manifest also a similarity in their critical attitude, preferring the intensely suggestive and reactionary to the classical in literature. One of the lesser Transcendentalists was Margaret Fuller Ossoli, who was too conspicuous in her own day to be left unmentioned, though her essays are not of enduring merit. As editor of *The Dial*, she exerted a perceptible influence upon contemporary life and thought and was able to demonstrate that a woman was qualified to associate as a co-worker with such literary lights as Emerson, Channing, Alcott and Thoreau. Her critical essays, though forceful and varied, are marked by repeated inaccuracies which may account for their neglect in the present day.

Amos Bronson Alcott. The most important essayist of the so-called Transcendental school was Emerson, but Amos Bronson Alcott has left his impression on the essay of this type by his three volumes, the *Concord Days*, *Table Talk* and *Tablets*. Many of these essays are but manuscript reproductions of Alcott's famous "conversations," and they exhibit no orderly treatment nor system of expression. As he himself said "We are not happy with the pen," yet, when he got away from the "vague reverie" of which he was so fond, he proved that he could write extremely well on subjects which he understood. This is true of his critical essays, which reveal him as a lover of books, and though his

reading was limited to the few lines of thought to which he was partial by temperament, his opinions of his chosen authors are always discriminating.

Ralph Waldo
Emerson—the
ideal American
essayist.

Closely allied with Alcott but rising immeasurably above him in literary importance was Ralph Waldo Emerson, who voiced for America the new *Zeitgeist* which marked the downfall of classicism and artificiality and the rise of naturalism and individual freedom of thought and expression. It is impossible to separate Emerson, the poet and philosopher, from Emerson, the essayist, but we must limit our concern to the literature of the Essays. His first two series of essays were collected from the best of his lectures. No other writer better exemplifies the close relationship that exists between the Essay and the oral utterance, for his lectures were but the reading of his essays. These two series were followed by the *Miscellanies*, *Representative Men*, *English Traits*, *The Conduct of Life*, *Society and Solitude* and *Letters and Social Aims*. Emerson was pre-eminently an essayist, and we may call him the most representative of all our essayists, for his works exemplify almost every possible class into which the American Essay developed. There are personal and broadly critical essays in the *Representative Men*, descriptive sketches appear among the *English Traits*, biographical and narrative elements are not lacking, nature is interpreted, and in their entirety, Emerson's essays, better than any others in our literature, fulfill the essay-ideal, in that they, each and all, are highly suggestive expressions of their author's personality. Ranging in subject from the homeliness of actual life to the vast wonderment of eternity and the mysteries of time and space, they utter a philosophy based upon observation and mystical insight. By the style of his essays Emerson proved that the American literary artist could free himself from English influence and create a new method which is inimitable; for Emerson's style is his own and owed nothing to Bacon, Addison or Carlyle, or any other English essayist. Here are but few balanced structures and no pedantry, Latinisms nor ornamental quotations. Though open to the charge of obscurity and incoherence, he is so to a less degree than is usually asserted of him, for the very expressions which at first, seem darkly incomprehensible somehow succeed in suggesting a thousand thoughts which eventually illuminate his meaning and set us groping toward unthought-of

lights. The style fits the man. He is the apostle of individualism, and as such he is the apostle of the literary development of America and the prophet of that ultimate ideal which it may attain when its culture shall triumph over its materialism. He says "here let there be what the earth waits for,—exalted manhood. What this country longs for is personalities, grand persons to counteract its materialities."

Emerson and Montaigne. Emerson appears more than ever as the ideal American essayist when we come to compare him with Montaigne. A detailed comparison of these two writers may prove of contributory interest here, since no essayist in any land has had more of kinship than Emerson with the great predecessor of all the genuine essayists.

A reader must, in imagination, make a long detour in passing from the France of the Sixteenth Century to the New England of the Nineteenth. His spirit, which, dwelling with Montaigne and storm-tossed by the discords, licentiousness and corruption of an unstable civilization, may have folded its wings close to the earth, will rise and soar unhindered when, with Emerson, it breathes of a moral atmosphere in a new and advanced civilization.

In comparing these two great essayists, separated as they were by centuries of time and thought, I have found so much of kinship in the essential qualities of each that it becomes interesting to picture how close an alliance might have existed between them could the soul of Montaigne have been reincarnated into the intellectual progress of Emerson's times. The differences between them are very clearly defined and evident, but ultimately are found to be the difference in degree of spiritual development; a result of their respective centuries rather than of any great unlikeness in the essayists themselves.

Similarity of impulse. Both seem to have had as the impulse that gave rise to their writings an unusual "ardor of reflection." Montaigne reflects chiefly on himself and his fellow-men. It is "the art of living completely and rightly" that engages his attention. He "surveys without judging" and is content to remain ignorant of the great Unknowable. He represents the Average Man. Emerson reflects unceasingly but ponders less upon himself than upon humanity, concerning whom he often reaches the same conclusions as Montaigne, but goes further, in that with an interest more intellectual than human, he often rises from the

contemplation of men and their commonplace lives into a speculation upon the life of the soul and mysteries of its existence. But it is life which is the chief interest of each, and in their reflections they arrive at the same conclusions with striking frequency as I have discovered in my search for similarities of subject-matter and thought.

Similarity of
subjects.

This same investigation led me to make the interesting discovery, that of Emerson's twenty essays there are only two for which I could find no parallel among those of Montaigne, and of those two I shall presently treat as most significant of the differences between the two writers. Not only does Emerson turn his attention to subjects which had interested Montaigne, but in the discussion of them one often finds the two men bridging the chasm of centuries with thoughts almost identical. It is hard to decide whether this be accidental or not, for Emerson in his essay on Montaigne frequently confesses that his personal regard for that writer may be unduly great, and goes on to relate with what ardor he had read Montaigne during his impressionable college days. This may or not account for their resemblances. To go into every possible detail of this parallelism would require a volume, and I shall indicate but briefly the result of my attempt to compare their subject-matter and conclusions.

Emerson's first subject is History and one may turn to Montaigne and find a discourse on books which includes a section on History. Their general comments on books, their opinions as to history, and their personal preferences for biography are strikingly alike. Emerson's *Self-reliance* is foreshadowed by Montaigne in *How One Ought to Govern His Will; Compensation* contains the same underlying idea as Montaigne's *We Taste Nothing Purely*. *Spiritual Laws* is briefly treated in Montaigne's *That a Man Ought Soberly to Meddle with Judging of Divine Laws*. Emerson's next essay is *Love*, and for this the parallel may be found in Montaigne's *On Some Verses of Vergil*, and though no two essays so strikingly illustrate the difference between the two centuries which they represent, yet even here one may find a few like conclusions. Emerson's *Heroism* contains a few thoughts from Montaigne's *Custom of the Isle of Cea*. His "Oversoul," the poetic title of which would mean nothing to Montaigne, sets forth many ideas which are embodied in the long "Apology" which forms the twelfth

chapter of Montaigne's second book. And so on through all but two of Emerson's essays we may discover the same subjects treated by Montaigne.

Similarity of thought. I have mentioned only the similarity of subjects, for lack of time has obliged me to omit copying and inserting the many parallelisms of thought which I found, and which reward a careful comparison of the essays. In two instances I discovered sentences which were almost identical.

A comparison of their style. Passing from their subject-matter to their general methods of expression certain characteristic likenesses and differences may be found. Both men pay greater attention to the thoughts they would express, than to the mode of expression. Though both are somewhat careful in the choice of words, yet it is spontaneity rather than study which characterizes the style of each. This same spontaneity causes both to depart from the canons of literary style. In Montaigne it results in a conversational method; "I speak to paper as I do to the first person I meet," he says; and this naturally leads him to discursiveness which marks and sometimes mars his style. He considers life, but never attempts to construct theories, and his chief interest being himself, he is always more personal than Emerson. Emerson's discourse takes on the nature of spoken language, but only when he rises above the tranquil actuality, and letting his intellectual activity have full sway, gives utterance to his thoughts in eloquent declamation. How frequently, nevertheless, Emerson, with his occasional egotism of genius, keen observation, wayward contemplations and personal humility and simplicity, reminds us of his voluble predecessor. Whenever Emerson is content to keep his feet upon the earth, he meets Montaigne upon a common vantage ground, and the latter easily reaches Emerson's level of thought and contemplation. Emerson, however, has heard the call of a "still small voice" within him, which speaks only to the chosen few, and obeying the summons he must needs leave Montaigne, "the average man" plodding upon the earth, while he, upon the wings of his spirit, rises to heights of poetry and mysticism and writes the two essays, one upon *Art* and the other on *The Poet* for which subjects I look in vain among all of Montaigne's discourses.

Differences. Montaigne has absolutely no regard for art. To Emerson it is the underlying principle in every human achievement. It is "the reappearance of the original soul," and beauty

in its highest manifestation. How seldom one finds that word *beauty* in Montaigne, except as applied to things temporal and human, and of poetry as such, he is equally oblivious. This gives rise to the most striking contrast in the expression of the two men. Montaigne's language is always perfectly intelligible, sometimes brutally frank and definite. Emerson, in every essay, makes use of words which may only be understood poetically. He is often vague, sometimes unintelligible, always *true poet* in suggesting more than can be perfectly expressed in words. Montaigne expresses an affectionate regard for certain poets, but always on account of some quality in the men themselves, or because their thoughts and manner of expression have struck a sympathetic chord in himself. He never rises into the poetic mood; never gets above *reality* with Emerson who says of the poet—

"Thou shalt leave the world and know the Muse only. Thou shalt not know any longer the times, customs, graces, politics or opinions of men, but shall take all from the Muse, Wherever is danger, and awe, and love, there is beauty, plenteous as rain, shed for thee; and though thou shouldest walk all the world over, thou shalt not be able to find a condition inopportune or ignoble."

Both of these essayists represent *life*. Montaigne is said to be more universal than Emerson. There is something of the Montaigne in all of us; but there is also for every man Emerson's realm of the spirit. It lies somewhat above Montaigne's middle regions of actuality, and, being more inaccessible, is less commonly inhabited; but it is none the less universal. Montaigne is of the earth, damp and sweet and wholesome; Emerson is of the mist, lying above but very near it. *Both are elemental.*

Henry David Thoreau. Following the traditions of Emerson, but founding a new and distinctively American type of Essay was Henry David Thoreau, whose contributions to our essays I have found it worth while to consider at some length, partly because he was the pioneer writer of those nature books which have developed into a most successful field of American letters, but more because of his literary style, which has not been excelled by any other essayist in our literature. Thoreau, as a stylist, has never been fully appreciated, nor have his characteristic qualities of thought and expression as yet received the attention they merit.

Thoreau—a
unique figure
in our
literature.

He is a unique figure, and his very peculiarities should endear him to us. So few of us are capable of creating particular ideals for ourselves. We prefer lazily to accept somebody's—or everybody's, and at last grow weary of finding endless repetitions of ourselves in the people we meet. But occasionally there appears a man whose individuality is so marked, that in his personality, his thought, his work, and the whole ordering of his life, we see reflections of the light of a lodestar which seems to shine for him alone. It is a fortunate event in literature when such a man finds it an expression for his individuality, and lets his pages bring his ideals within the vision of his fellow-men. If he be but sincere and unaffected, how the generations love him for showing his real self to his readers! It is his book, along with Walton's and Browne's, that we carry about with us; for I have often noticed that those volumes which seem to defy classification and which fit on no particular shelf of our library, do familiarly attach themselves to our persons and our affections, becoming thumbed and marked, growing old along with us, while the properly placed series in the book-case remains perennially unworn—and too often—unread. American literature has produced but few such books, for we in America have as yet been too busy in constructing the common highways to be spared for the blazing of our own particular trails. But there came a period in the past century when the spirit of Transcendentalism brooded over our brave New England and set the people so a-flutter with new thoughts and longings that they straightway began to open new vistas for themselves and us. Henry David Thoreau is usually ranked among the Concord group of Transcendentalists which includes Emerson, Alcott, Channing and Margaret Fuller. He probably belonged to the same constellation, but his is a lonely light shining slightly apart from the rest. He preferred to be *alone*, and so profitably did he consult his own genius that his writings are to be numbered among the beloved "lonely" books of our literature.

His essays—
an expression
of his own
personality.

Thoreau's first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* is the result of a "dual solitude." *Walden*, his next and best known work, was the outcome of the years he spent alone in a self-built shanty on the edge of Walden Pond. These two were published during his lifetime and may be considered as a series of essays. Subsequently his miscellaneous essays, excursions and journals

were edited. So imbued are all his writings with his own personality and ideals that he might have exclaimed with Montaigne, "myselfe am the groundworke of my booke." That this self was essentially different from other people, all must acknowledge, but he was so in a manner to win our admiration rather than to merit the derision which some skeptical critics have been pleased to direct toward his most cherished projects. Thoreau, the *man*, was pre-eminently a Yankee—lacking only the Yankee's narrowness of view; curious, kindly, simple, quizzical, humorous, self-helping, and beneath all his culture lay "that wildness in him which nothing could subdue." William Ellery Channing, his kindest biographer, says, "He was one of those who keep so much of the boy in them that he could never pass a berry without picking it." His life was a succession of Concord days, varied only by occasional excursions to the Maine Woods or the New England Coast. His philosophy might be summed up as a devotion to simplicity of life, purity of thought, and singleness of purpose. It was but the working out of his own inherent desire for the permanent and unchangeable which caused him to find nature the most appealing and absorbing interest of his life.

Thoreau more than a naturalist. Thoreau says, "here I have been forty years learning the language of these fields that I may the better express *myself*." I have thought that too great stress is commonly laid upon the fact that Thoreau was a naturalist. It is as if we were to emphasize Sir Thomas Browne's medical knowledge to the exclusion of his literary charms. Channing designates Thoreau "the Poet-Naturalist" and that is more fitting, but it does not suggest his breadth of thought, which seems to touch life at so many points, his keen critical ability—and his mastery of prose-style. Had he been less a poet, he would have been a genuine man of science, for he had a passion for particulars which he vented in his observations of nature. But he found an entirely new way of looking at nature. What he found there was not a mere collection of text-book facts; nor was it a goddess to be worshipped and sung about in classical allusions. He knew the flora and fauna of his native environment wonderfully well, but he knew them sympathetically. He saw Nature through a Poet's eye and what he saw filled him with awe and wonder. His chief delight in nature, however, seemed to rest upon the thoughts and emotions which even her most unattractive and neglected objects might suggest to his own par-

ticularly receptive temperament, and of these his books are the record.

The Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers is to me the most delightful of all his works, though *Walden* seems to have been more widely read. The book is divided into seven chapters, one for each

day of the week, and it is an account of an excursion up the rivers, undertaken by Thoreau and his brother. One of the chief charms of the book lies in the art by which Thoreau takes his readers along with him, interesting us in every external detail of the setting out, the day's sail, the night's camp, the country; and though he constantly breaks the narrative by frequent digressions upon history, philosophy or criticism, we resume the journey so naturally with him that these long meditations seem but the proper whiling away of those quiet hours on a quiet stream. It takes, however, wonderful literary craftsmanship to blend such a diversity of themes into a harmonious whole. "The Week" is a book for moods. In it, if longing for the open, one can enjoy the out-of-doors; if oppressed by the ordinary, one can find fresh enthusiasms in its simple ideals; if bored by monotony, it furnishes new thought on the old subjects of friendship, religion and literature. Reading it, we can but wonder at the slight notice it received when published, for, out of a thousand copies printed, seven hundred came back to Thoreau, causing him to say that he had made an addition of seven hundred volumes to his library and all of them his own composition, adding this characteristic remark—"I believe that this result is more inspiring and better for me than if a thousand had bought my wares. It affects my privacy less, and leaves me freer." The remarkable thing is that he *meant* it.

"Walden." Thoreau's experiment of living alone at Walden Pond has been variously viewed by his friends and critics. Some chose to regard it as a fad, others as a pose. The surest solution is to take his own statement as to why he went there. He says—

"My purpose in going to Walden Pond was not to live cheaply nor to live dearly there, but to transact some private business with the fewest obstacles."

The "private business" was to edit "The Week." Channing says—

"The fact that our author lived for awhile alone in a shanty near a pond or *stagnum*, and named one of his books after the place

where it stood, has led some to say he was a barbarian or misanthrope. It was a writing case. Here, in this wooden inkstand he wrote a good part of his famous 'Walden.' In 'Walden' we come closest to Thoreau's ideals; the book is the expression of them. It is his protest against the extravagances of modern life; his plea for sanity in living; and it is also a revelation of the kinship that existed between Thoreau and nature. His mystical allegory is familiar to the readers of 'Walden.'

'I long ago lost a hound, a bay horse, and a turtle dove, and am still on their trail. Many are the travellers I have spoken to concerning them, describing their tracks and what calls they respond to. I have met one or two who had heard the hound, and the tramp of the horse, and even seen the dove disappear behind the cloud, and they seemed as anxious to recover them as if they had lost them themselves.'"

Says Samuel Arthur Jones—

"Alas for us all! they had lost them, even as we have; for what is the hound but the divine scent that finds the trail; what the bay horse but sagacity and strength to carry us in pursuit; what the turtle dove but innocence to secure the divine protection? And we have lost them all. Are we still on the trail?

Thoreau kept there 'till he disappeared behind the cloud.'"

His prose style.

I wish that time would permit me to treat of the humor and insight of his *Cape Cod*, the particular charm of his journals, the artistic value of his various essays, but it is necessary to pass on to a consideration of the qualities of his prose style.

Thoreau's style, like his life and thought, is marked by purity and simplicity. He had a broad knowledge of literature and his preferences were the early poets and prose writers. He writes—

"We cannot escape the impression that the Muse has stopped a little in her flight, when we come to the literature of civilized eras. . . . When we come to the pleasant English verse, the storms have all cleared away, and it will never thunder and lighten any more. The poet has come within doors, and exchanged the forest and crag for the fireside, the hut of the Gael and Stonehenge, with its circles of stones, for the house of the Englishman."

Thoreau from his reading had acquired an admiration for certain authors—a fine discrimination of literary values, but it is significant that his own writings present no imitation, and as a stylist he belongs to no particular school. He asks—"Shall I not have words as fresh as my thoughts? Shall I use any other man's word? A genuine thought or feeling would find

expression for itself, if it had to invent hieroglyphics." Thoreau was a master in leaving out the unessential. He never indulged in a pretty phrase nor a sentimentality. Stevenson says—

"Upon me this pure, narrow, ascetic Thoreau had exercised a great charm: I have scarce written ten sentences since I was introduced to him but his influence might be detected."

Thoreau had a great respect for sentences, of which he says—

"A perfectly healthy *sentence*, it is true is extremely rare. For the most part we miss the hue and the fragrance of the thought. . . . The most attractive sentences are, perhaps, not the wisest, but the surest and the roundest.

The scholar may be sure that he writes the tougher truth for the calluses on his palms. They give firmness to the sentence. We are often struck by the force and precision of style to which hard-working men, unpractised in writing, easily attain when required to make the effort. . . . The sentences written by such rude hands are nervous and tough, the sinews of the deer, or the roots of the pine."

His
paragraphs. Applying these ideals to his own writings, Thoreau produced that effect of ease, which is only to be attained by the laborious casting and recasting of sentences and paragraphs. His paragraphs are models of careful construction. I shall quote a paragraph upon the subject of *literary themes*.

"Men commonly exaggerate the theme. Some themes they think are significant, and others insignificant. I feel that my life is very homely, my pleasures very cheap. Joy and sorrow, success and failure, grandeur and meanness, and indeed most words in the English language, do not mean for me what they do for my neighbours. I see that my neighbours look with compassion on me, that they think it is a mean and unfortunate destiny which makes me walk in these fields and woods so much, and sail on this river alone. But so long as I find here the only real elysium, I cannot hesitate in my choice. My work is writing, and I do not hesitate though I know that no subject is so trivial for me, tried by ordinary standards; for, ye fools! the theme is nothing, the life is everything. All that interests the reader is the depth and intensity of the life exerted. We touch our subject by a point which has no breadth, but the pyramid of our experience, or our interest in it, rests on us by a broader or narrower base. What is man is all in all, nature nothing but as she draws him out and reflects him. Give me the simple, cheap and homely themes."

His sentences. Thoreau varied his sentence length with wonderful skill, and I know no writer more adept in the construction of exceedingly long sentences which are at the same time not in the least involved as to meaning. Here is a sentence of one hundred and sixty-three words.

✓ "Many waves are there agitated by the winds, keeping nature fresh, the spray blowing in your face, reeds and rushes waving; ducks by the hundred, all uneasy in the surf, in the raw wind, just ready to rise, and now going off with a clatter and a whistling like riggers straight from Labrador, flying against the stiff gale with reefed wings, or else circling round first, with all their paddles briskly moving, just over the surf, to reconnoitre you before they leave these parts; gulls wheeling overhead, muskrats swimming for dear life, wet and cold, with no fire to warm them by that you know of; their labored homes rising here and there like haystacks; and countless mice and moles and winged titmice along the sunny, windy shore; cranberries tossed on the waves and heaving up on the beach, their little skiffs beating about among the alders;—such healthy, natural tumult as proves the last day is not yet at hand."

Lowell says (and it is the only just thing he does say of Thoreau)—

"There are sentences of his as perfect as anything in the language, and thoughts as clearly crystallized."

The choice of these perfect sentences is difficult for they are so many. Of them all I have culled the following for their diction, or rhythm, or poetic suggestiveness.

✓ "At length the antepenultimate and drowsy hours drew on, and all the sounds were denied entrance to our ears."

"Gradually the village murmur subsided, and we seemed to be embarked upon the placid current of our dreams, floating from past to future as silently as one awakes to fresh morning or evening thoughts."

"The buds swell imperceptibly, without hurry or confusion' as if the short spring days were an eternity."

"Some hours seem not to be occasion for any deed, but for resolves to draw breath in."

"The light gradually forsook the deep water, as well as the deeper air, and the gloaming came to the fishes as well as to us, and more dim and gloomy to them, whose day is a perpetual twilight, though sufficiently bright for their weak and watery eyes."

"The morning wind for ever blows, the poem of creation is uninterrupted; but few are the ears that hear it."

"How unsupportable would be the days, if the night with its dews and darkness did not come to restore the drooping world."

I dare not begin to quote passages to show his poetic interpretation of nature—for they defy choosing. I must add just two brush strokes with which he depicts the birds.

"The bluebird carries the sky on his back."

"The tanager flies through the green foliage as if it would ignite the leaves."

Multum
in parvo.

We find in all his works the frequent philosophical summing-up of a subject, a broad generalization—*multum in parvo*. There is much of this in the essay on Friendship in Wednesday of "The Week," as where he says—

"Friendship is evanescent in every man's experience and remembered like heat lightning in past summers."

"A friend is one who incessantly pays us the compliment of expecting from us all the virtues, and who can appreciate them in us."

"The friend asks no return but that his friend will religiously accept and wear and not disgrace his apotheosis of him. They cherish each other's hopes. They are kind to each other's dreams."

"Walden" too is rich in such passages. I shall quote only one.

"To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, magnanimity and trust."

Quotability. Thoreau's work is a splendid example of a style characterized by quotability, as evinced in such sentences as—

"Poetry is the mysticism of mankind."

"Our life is frittered away by detail."

"The unconsciousness of man is the consciousness of God."

"Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not required to buy one necessary of the soul."

"How can we expect a harvest of thought, who have not had a seed-time of character?"

"Only he can be trusted with gifts who can present a face of bronze to expectations."

Satire.

He occasionally indulges in satire. One such instance—aimed against modern novel readers is worth quoting—

“They read the nine thousandth tale about Zebulon and Se-phronia, and how they loved as none had ever loved before, and neither did the course of their true love run smooth,—at any rate, how it did run and stumble, and get up again and go on! how some poor unfortunate got up on to a steeple, who had better never have gone as far as the belfry; and then having needlessly got him up there, the happy novelist rings the bell for all the world to come together and hear, oh dear! how he did get down again! For my part; I think that they had better metamorphose all such spring heroes of universal noveldom into man weather-cocks, as they used to put heroes among the constellations and let them swing round and round until they are rusty, and not come down at all to bother honest men with their pranks. The next time the novelist rings the bell I will not stir though the meeting house burn down. ‘The Skip of the Tip-Toe-Hop’ a Romance of the Middle Ages, by the celebrated author of ‘Tittle-Tol-Tan,’ to appear in monthly parts; a great rush; don’t all come together.’”

Humor.

Lowell finds no humor in Thoreau’s pages. Some critics find only his “Cape Cod” humorous. It seems to me that all his works are pervaded by a humor, which one critic calls “a pleasant sour” but which seems to me to be rather the quizzical humor of the true New Englander, for whom the grotesque or the droll had a special appeal. It has been a pleasure to collect some of these subtle humorous flashes which brighten his pages. I can quote only a few,—

“There is no kind of herb, but somebody or other says that it is good. I am very glad to hear it. It reminds me of the first chapter of Genesis.”

“Who has not seen a salt fish, thoroughly cured for this world, so that nothing can spoil it, and putting the perseverance of the saints to blush? With which you may sweep or pave the streets, and split your kindlings, and the teamster shelter himself and his lading against the sun, wind and rain behind it,—and the trader, as a Concord trader once did, hang it up by his door for a sign when he commences business, until at last his oldest customer cannot tell surely whether it be animal, vegetable or mineral, and yet it shall be pure as a snow flake, and if put into a pot and boiled, will come out an excellent done fish for a Saturday’s dinner.”

“I have had twenty-five or thirty souls, *with their bodies*, at once under my roof.”

"This coach was an exceedingly narrow one, but as there was a slight spherical excess over two on a seat, the driver waited until nine passengers had got in, without taking the measure of any of them, and then shut the door after two or three ineffectual slams, as if the fault were all in the hinges and the latch,—while we timed our inspirations and expirations so as to assist him."

There was "the Woman who looked as if it made her head ache to live," and the meeting house of which he says: "Its windows being open, my meditations were interrupted by the noise of a preacher who shouted like a boatswain, profaning the quiet atmosphere, and who, I fancied, must have taken off his coat. Few things could have been more discouraging and disheartening. I wished the tithing-man would stop him," and houses which were "surrounded by fish-flakes close up to the sills, so that instead of looking out into a flower or grass plot, you looked into so many square rods of cod turned wrong side outwards. These parterres were said to be least like a flower-garden in a good dry-
ing day in midsummer."

Another charm for me lies in his surprises—the unexpected which suddenly confronts one in reading him, like the following—

"What risks we run! famine, fire and pestilence, and the thousand forms of a cruel fate,—and yet every man lives till he . . . dies."

"A man *sits* as many risks as he *runs*."

"God is alone,—but the devil, he is far from being alone; he sees a great deal of company."

"Some circumstantial evidence is very strong, as when you find a trout in the milk."

"You might make a curious list of articles which fishes have swallowed,—sailors' open clasp knives, and bright tin snuff boxes, not knowing what is in them,—and jugs, and jewels, and *Jonah*."

Is not all this enough to endear him to us? I can but feel that Thoreau is neglected, and that it is because some people have obtained a false view of him by seeing him through the eyes of those critics who have not done him justice. It will be well for our authors when American criticism becomes an art in the hands of the lay readers, for then our Thoreaus shall not have lived in vain.

No writers have equalled the Americans in the field of nature-books. To Thoreau belongs the honor of having found a new

and interpretative way of writing about nature, and he still excels his successors in this field. As a stylist, we have no more admirable writer in our American literature. But, after all, is not his most tonic influence in the field of personality and thought? No other writer has so decried the falsity of the non-essential, and so held up the ideal of individuality. He says—

“Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.”

Truly Thoreau himself “heard a different drummer,” and his life and his books can do much in helping us to get rid of our false estimates.

John Burroughs. Thoreau's most famous successor in the field of the Nature Essay is John Burroughs, who surpasses his predecessor, if viewed merely on the side of personality. No other Nature-writer has so won the affection and admiration of his readers. He writes of Nature—birds and bees and wee friendly animals, fields and woods and simple living—and yet, in all his essays, he grants us the pleasure of his own companionship in a manner so friendly that no suggestion of pride or self-consciousness mars the genuine charm of his style. Burroughs, faithful to that diversity of subjects which characterizes the works of all true essayists, also turns his attention to literature, philosophy and religion. His appreciations of Emerson and Whitman are unsurpassed, and his criticism of Carlyle, Burns and Wordsworth are truly interpretative. The difference between the English and the American attitude toward nature is admirably expressed by Burroughs when, he says in *Fresh Fields* (a study of British scenes) that he found the British muse of nature to be “a gentle, wholesome, slightly stupid divinity of the fields,” while our own poetry of nature he characterizes as marked by “a piney, woodsey flavor that is unknown in the older literatures.” Burroughs's style is truly American. It is clear and forceful, free of urbanity, but brightened by many unexpected shades of meaning and piquant flashes of humor which partly atone for the lack of those higher qualities of power, passion and imagination which rank Thoreau above him in literary craftsmanship.

The Personal
Essayists.

Besides the essays in the field of Criticism, the class of writers representing both Critical and Personal

essays, the Transcendental and Nature essayists, the Nineteenth Century produced essays which have their kinship with the more purely Personal Essays as found in England in the works of Lamb and Stevenson, and descending from Irving in our own literature. These essays embody the everyday observations and meditations of thoughtful men, who illuminated their pages now and then with quiet narrative, and descriptive elements.

Walt Whitman. The prose writings of Walt Whitman are a connecting link between the classes we have already noted, and the Essay of Personality which remains to be considered. In his essays, Whitman ventured into criticism and philosophy, fraternized with humanity, communed with nature and idolized his native land in a manner that marks him as a literary descendant of Emerson and Thoreau. But he strikes the personal note more strongly than any of the writers of these classes. To understand Whitman and his poetry, one must turn to his prose. His complete prose works include the *Specimen Days*, *Notes Left Over*, *Pieces in Early Youth*, *November Boughs*, *Good-bye to Fancy*, and *Some Laggards Yet*. Taken together these aim to present a complete picture of humanity as he knew it in his own land and times. Among formless jottings, there are more elaborate pieces which assume the Essay proportions. In all of them, whether they be reminiscences of his army days, experiences in country or city, or reflections concerning literature and life—he is autobiographical and ranks among our personal essayists. His prose is not elegant but it represents the style of a healthy, typical American. His ramblings made him dear to those lovers of the Personal Essayists, who delight to browse in such books as these. His chief claim to recognition in a study of the American Essay lies in the fact that his essays, more than those of any other writer since Emerson, are unmistakably American in thought and style. Even in his critical papers¹ he is searching only for the literature which can be of service to his beloved America. It is safe to say that no other land could have produced his two volumes of essays.

Nathaniel Hawthorne. Whitman was autobiographical, but he lacked the quietly contemplative nature of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

¹ The critical essays bear the following titles *Emerson's Books (the shadows of them)*, *The Bible as Poetry*, *What Lurks Behind Shakespeare's Historical Plays?* *Robert Burns as a Poet and Person*, *A Word about Tennyson*, *Shakespeare for America*, etc.

If "style is the man," we may account for the fact that Whitman's was full of crudities, while that of Hawthorne was so perfect as to rank his works among the classics of literature. Though Hawthorne's chief fame lies in the path of the novel, some of his more artistic productions are pure essays, and we may say that he perfected the Personal Essay of the narrative and descriptive type in our literature, which has received no richer legacy than such essays as his *Rill from the Town Pump*, *Sights from a Steeple*, *The Toll-Gatherer's Day*, *The Sister Years*, *Night Sketches*, and others equally dear to his readers. He also wrote a less popular volume of essays on English life, known as *Our Old Home*. The repose of his essays is the outcome of his thoughtful personality. As Poe said, "he never surpassed the limitations of the quiet." He is our master artist in style, and as such, he succeeded in lifting the American Personal Essay of narration into the classical ranks with Lamb and Hunt and Stevenson.

Oliver Wendell
Holmes.

But these last named English essayists never confined themselves to writing mere narrative and reflective descriptions of what they saw so suggestively in the outside world. Since the days of Montaigne, the Personal Essayists have been at their best when they sank into their "literary arm chair" and chatted familiarly with the reader upon all sorts of subjects. American literature is as yet of too brief a history and the years of its growth have been too troubled and full of the business of life to produce many men who could surrender themselves to the "wise and airy leisure" that would permit them to neglect all purposeful motives and talk to us in their essays seemingly for the mere love of talking. But a few American essayists have been content just to chat awhile. Most prominent of these is Oliver Wendell Holmes, who, by virtue of literary ramblings and discursiveness, deserves to be ranked among the Personal Essayists, though his works are of a kind that almost defies classification. Neither *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*, nor its successors in the same field, *The Poet at the Breakfast Table* and *Over the Tea Cups*, can be considered as extended essays, and their varied contents are too strongly held together by the threads of narrative and character to permit us to isolate certain Essay passages. They belong among the miscellaneous books of our literature, but we must nevertheless recognize their spirit as identical with that of the Personal Essay. *Every Man*

his own *Boswell* is the humorous motto which Holmes prefixed to the first of his *Autocrat* series, and the book lives up to the motto. If Holmes had possessed less originality in inventing a method of expression all his own, he would certainly have ranked as the foremost of our writers in the field of the familiarly Personal Essay.

Donald Grant Mitchell. (Ik Marvel.) The purely Personal Essays, if they attain to any recognizable degree of artistic merit become dearer than any others in their generation, and no Nineteenth Century essays obtained a larger circulation than did the *Reveries of a Bachelor* and the *Dream Life* of Donald Grant Mitchell ("Ik Marvel"). Their author was a born man of letters, and a typical Personal Essayist, for he wrote with no didactic aim in view, but with a mere desire to express himself and add to the joy of life and the pleasure of his readers. Like Irving's, his essays are pervaded by a "fine old-fashioned flavor." There is charm and atmosphere and emotion in his pages, besides the revelation of a personality at once worthy of both love and admiration. In their complete freedom from all traces of the hurry and strenuousness of modern life, these essays are unique in their day, and we wish that American literature included more of them than the few which remain to be mentioned.

Other Personal Essayists. Charles Dudley Warner is another essayist whose kinship is with Irving. His essays are pervaded by a delicate humor, which is best illustrated in his *My Summer in a Garden*. The *Backlog Studies* are delightful essays, and, as their title would indicate, they are the intimate fireside conversations in which the author reveals to his reader an interesting and charming personality. The *Ponkapog Papers* of Thomas Bailey Aldrich are Personal Essays of a texture so fine and delicate that the reader wishes their author had devoted more of his literary talents to prose of this kind. The same might be said of the prose papers scattered among the *Poems and Fancies* of Edward Everett Hale.

Lafcadio Hearn. The transition of the essays of the present day brings us to the consideration of a writer whose death occurred while the century was new. The essays of Lafcadio Hearn do not fall into any of the general classifications which have been assumed. They are the exotic plants of our modern literature. Hearn longed "to create something in English—analogueous to that warmth and color and richness of imagery hitherto

peculiar to Latin literature," and he succeeded in doing just that, especially in his elusive and weirdly beautiful interpretations of Japanese life and literature. He was essentially a mystic and a seer, and his style was the perfect expression of a temperament which found its chief delight in things detached, intangible and impenetrable. It is the color and the beauty of the Orient, and the echoes of forgotten sighs and tears which pervade his pages.

The Essays
of To-day.

It is impossible to assign a definite place in the history of the American Essay to those essays which are being written at the present time. The fate of once popular Nineteenth Century essayists, whose work is now almost forgotten, proves how futile is the expectation that the judgment and taste of posterity will confirm our own conclusions; and it is not profitable to estimate the work of living writers, unless it be of such as may have "found themselves" and already reached their highest literary achievement. But the best always endures, and our Essay of the present day is in the hands of writers who represent each class of its development. The Nature Essays are being continued by Charles Conrad Abbott, and in a less scientific way by Hamilton W. Mabie and Henry Van Dyke. No form of Essay has proved so exclusively American as this and it is to be hoped that the mantle of Thoreau may some day fall upon men who are able to attain the standards which he set. Hamilton W. Mabie and Dr. Van Dyke also represent the critical and personal types. The best-loved Essay of Discursive Personality is receiving new vitality in the delightful essays of Agnes Repplier and Samuel McChord Crothers. The Critical Essay seems to be establishing itself upon a more enduring basis than any of these. We have noted that the Nineteenth Century produced only Whipple who devoted his entire talent to criticism. It is significant that, after so many intervening years, another writer has appeared thus early in the Twentieth Century, with a like ardor and gift for criticism impelling him to make it his life profession. The *Shelburne Essays* of Paul Elmer More represent a new uplift in American literary methods. The curse of American temperament has been its lack of thoroughness—its inability to carry on detailed and continued investigation—its poverty in that concentration by which the European mind attains far-reaching results. It bodes well for our future when a contemporary writer brings to bear upon his subjects the thorough and varied knowledge which is evinced in the essays of Mr. More. If it were their

superficiality which killed hundreds of the American essays which are recorded in my Bibliography, and which have sunk into oblivion, it is safe to predict that work so thorough as Mr. More's will endure and prove a tonic influence, not perhaps in the literary style, but in the thought of the future.

The Future
of the Essay.

And what is the future of the *Essay* as a form of literary expression? There are many who prophesy that it is falling into disuse; that it is being supplanted by other kinds of writing. "The Passing of the Essay" and "The Decay of the Essay" are favorite subjects for discussion. The prevailing argument against its future is based upon the fact that modern life is too strenuous to foster a form of writing that requires a meditative and contemplative mood for its inspiration. But Essays as we have seen, have always existed in literature and the product of the ages is not to be easily eradicated. It is true that life, and especially American life, becomes more and more a clash and complexity, but the Essay's chief claim to permanence is its ability to interpret any of life's phases, and amid all the breathlessly toiling thousands, there are always a few who stand apart, looking on and thinking. Our very lack of leisure is multiplying our Essays which are, for many readers, a short-cut to culture. The growing number of periodicals creates a constant demand for this form of writing. It would seem that the future of the American essay is assured.

Conclusion.

We began this study with an unsatisfied search for a definition of the Essay as it appears in literature. The answer has evolved itself from the study represented in these pages. *An Essay is the suggestive expression of a contemplative personality, in a prose composition of adequate length to present whatever aspect of a subject the author has in mind.* It stands in the history of the world's literature as the most fitting monument to the intellectual personality of the Individual in the passing generations.

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SECTION II. Magazine Articles on the Essay.

SECTION III. Early American Newspapers and Periodicals containing Essays.

SECTION IV. American Essayists including,—

(a) Early Essayists.

(b) Major Modern Essayists.

(c) Supplementary List of Minor American Essayists.

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SECTION IV.

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SECTION IV.

(C) A SUPPLEMENTARY LIST OF MINOR AMERICAN ESSAYISTS.

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VITA.

Adaline May Conway, born in Brooklyn, New York, 1882; daughter of Thomas W. Conway (Civil War Chaplain, Minister, Editor, Educator, State Superintendent of Education in Louisiana, Superintendent of the Freedmen's Bureau in the Department of the Gulf); attended Port Richmond High School: entered the Normal College of the City of New York in 1899, receiving the Bachelor's degree in 1902; entered New York University in 1905, receiving the Master's degree in 1908. (Thesis: "English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century as Shown in the Works of Matthew Gregory Lewis"); received the Doctor's degree in 1911; Instructor in Public School No. 20, Manhattan, 1902-1905, and in Public School No. 130, Brooklyn, 1905-1911; resigned from teaching profession in 1911 to engage in authorship and in literary and historical research; author of "A Silent Peal from the Liberty Bell," published in Philadelphia, 1914, and other works to be issued.

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